

VOL. 107
ISSN 0032-6178



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

OCTOBER 2002



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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Cover: Swami Vivekananda's Temple at Ramakrishna Math, Belur, near Kolkata.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 107

OCTOBER 2002

No. 10

Traditional Wisdom

SPIRITUAL TEACHER

बीजस्यान्तरिवाङ्कुरो जगदिदं प्राङ्निर्विकल्पं पुनः मायाकल्पितदेशकालकलनावैचित्र्यचित्रीकृतम् ।
मायावीव विजृम्भयत्यपि महायोगीव यः स्वेच्छया तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

This infinite universe—which in the beginning rests without name or form like the sprout in a seed, and, after creation, by the power of time and space imagined through maya appears to be many, possessed of manifold shapes and hues—projects outside as though by a magician or a mighty yogi by the sheer will of Śrī Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the form of my guru. To Him I bow in reverence. (*Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotram*, 2)

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो वसन्तवल्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।
तीर्णाः स्वयं भीमभवार्षणं जनानहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

There are calm and magnanimous good souls who do good to others as does the spring and who, having crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross it, not impelled by any motive whatsoever. (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 37)

If a man in the form of a guru awakens spiritual consciousness in you, then know for certain that it is God the Absolute who has assumed that human form for your sake. The guru is like a companion who leads you by the hand. ... The distinction between the teacher and the disciple ceases to exist after the disciple attains to Brahman. The relationship between them remains as long as the disciple does not see God. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 217)

The guru is both inner and outer. From outside he gives a push to the mind to turn inward while from inside he pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in quieting it. That is the grace of the guru. There is no difference between God, guru and Self. ... You mistake the body for the guru. But the guru himself does not make that mistake. He is the formless Self. That is within you. He appears outwardly only to guide you. (Sri Ramana Maharshi)

∞ This Month ∞

Four Tiers of Devotion, this month's editorial, discusses four steps of devotion outlined in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features this month excerpts from 'The Call of India', an article by a Western disciple [of Swami Vivekananda], and an appeal for a Swami Vivekananda Memorial for 'propagation of Hindu religion and philosophy', issued by devotees in Madras (now Chennai).

The early stages of the Kankhal Sevashrama, visits of Swamis Brahmanandaji and Turiyanandaji, and the story of the acceptance of the Sevashrama sadhus by the local sadhu community—Swami Sarvagatanandaji describes all this in the second part of his inspiring reminiscences of Kankhal Sevashrama and Swami Kalyananandaji, titled '**You Will Be a Paramahansa!**' A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston.

In the second part of his article **Education according to Vedanta**, Swami Pitambaranandaji discusses the process of education: how knowledge is acquired, the role of concentration and different methodologies for different minds. The author is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

The Vedanta Society of Southern California in Hollywood discovered recently two **Unpublished Photographs** of Swami Vivekananda. Details of the discovery are followed by copies of the two photographs on art paper.

In his brief article **General, Particular and Holy Mother** Swami Sunirmalanandaji attempts an analysis of Sri Sarada Devi's life

from a new angle. A former editor of this journal, the author now teaches at the Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math.

In his well-researched article **The Vedic Concept of God in All Its Aspects** Swami Mukhyanandaji, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, traces the evolution of the Vedic conception of God. The article is based on his lecture at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, on 5 August 1968 when he was its assistant secretary. The author is presently in Belur Math and has a number of books and articles to his credit.

Sri Ramakrishna's Kali: A Philosophical Study is an attempt by Dr Debabrata Das at studying the Kali symbology vis-a-vis the formless Brahman, in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

Jābāla Upaniṣad is the second instalment of the translation of this Sannyasa Upaniṣad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The notes are based on Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives features incidents from the lives of Pūsalār Nāyanār and Rasik Murari.

In **Inter-religious Harmony in a Multi-religious Society** Major H Subramanian (retired) underlines the need for harmony of religions and the need for a deeper study of one's own religion to ensure that harmony. Based in Bangalore, the author is engaged in promoting a 'a new religious consciousness' in India and abroad through lectures and articles.

Four Tiers of Devotion

EDITORIAL

The search for an abiding reality amidst ever-changing life has been a unique feature of India's spiritual heritage. As a result of such a quest, a rishi exclaimed: 'I have discovered that great, luminous Reality, beyond all darkness. By knowing Him alone can one transcend (birth and) death; there is no other way [to the supreme Goal].'¹

The Goal of Life

Time and again this eternal Truth has been validated by the spiritual experiences of saints and sages. And the realization of this Truth is held as the highest human value. According to Sri Shankaracharya, if a person does not struggle for Self-realization despite being blessed with a rare human birth, he is called a suicide because he holds fast to the unreal and kills himself.² Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated by his pure life of burning renunciation and one-pointed spiritual quest that God is the only reality and God-realization is the goal of life. Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great saint who revived the path of discrimination (*vicāra mārṅa*), put it beautifully: 'The one who limits the Self by believing himself to be the body and mind has killed his own Self. For killing the Self he has to be punished. The punishment is birth and death and continuous misery.'³

All told, only one in thousands aspires for realization. And out of thousands of such aspirants only a few know the Truth in reality.⁴ And why does the majority not think about their spiritual destiny, the goal of life? Sri Shankaracharya's illuminating commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is as poetic in Sanskrit as it is significant:

Alas, how unfathomable, inscrutable and variegated is this maya! Though identical with the

supreme Reality and instructed as such, none grasps the fact that he is the supreme Self. On the other hand, even without being told, people accept as their Self the aggregate of body and senses under the idea 'I am the son of such and such' though this aggregate is only an object of perception like pots and so on. Indeed, it is through the maya of the supreme Being that everyone revolves (in the cycle of birth and death).⁵

The Acharya observes elsewhere in the same Upanishad: 'With a solicitude more than that of thousands of parents, the Vedas teach about the oneness of the Atman. One should give up pride and the perception of differences born of an atheistic and argumentative attitude and eagerly aspire after Self-realization.'⁶

Difficulty in the Worship of a Formless God

Though the formless Reality—Atman (behind our personality) or Brahman (behind the universe)—is intellectually very satisfying, one needs to start from where one is. For those whom the world, including their body and mind, is very real, worshipping a formless Reality can end up just as an intellectual exercise. One needs to depersonalize oneself before depersonalizing God. As long as one is conscious of one's personality, devotion to a Personal God or an incarnation of God is the logical way in spiritual life. Sri Krishna makes the point clear in the *Bhagavadgītā*: 'The task of those whose minds are set on the Unmanifest is more difficult; for the ideal of the Unmanifest is hard to attain for those who are conscious of their bodies' (12.5). He continues reassuringly: 'But those who consecrate all their actions to Me, regarding Me as their supreme Goal, and who worship Me and meditate on

Me with single-minded concentration—to them whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, verily I become before long, O Partha, the Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world’ (12.6-7). Here ‘Me’ can apply equally to any holy Form other than Sri Krishna’s, including those of other incarnations.

But worshipping God with unswerving devotion, and meditation on Him with single-minded concentration pertain to a very advanced stage of spiritual life. For spiritual aspirants Sri Krishna himself prescribes a fourfold path in descending order of difficulty.

1. Fixing the Mind and *Buddhi* on God

His teaching continues: ‘Fix your mind on Me, rest your *buddhi* in Me. Undoubtedly you will live in Me hereafter’ (12.8). The word used for mind is *manas*, the deliberative faculty in us, which cogitates on the pros and cons of a particular issue. Sri Krishna advocates that this mind should be soaked in Him. *Buddhi* is the decision-making and discriminative faculty. Sri Ramanuja’s commentary on ‘rest your *buddhi* in Me’ is significant: ‘*Aham-eva paramaprāpya iti adhyavasāyam kuru*. Strengthen yourself by the conviction that I alone am the supreme Object to be attained.’ Sri Ramanuja does not interpret ‘hereafter’ as ‘after the fall of the body’, but as ‘after focusing your mind on Me with the firm conviction that I alone am the supreme Object to be attained’. Clearly, this prescription is for those with inborn hankering for God and whose mind always tends towards Him.

2. The Yoga of Constant Practice

Sri Krishna continues: ‘In case you are not able to hold fast your mind on Me steadily, then seek to reach Me, O Arjuna, by the yoga of constant practice’ (12.9). Elsewhere He describes this practice: ‘Setting the mind firmly on the Self under the direction of a steadfast *buddhi*, one should practise tranquillity little by little and abstain from every kind of

thought. Whenever the unsteady and fickle mind strays from the ideal, it should be brought to abide in the Self alone’ (6.25-6). Again, when Arjuna asks him about the control of his unsteady and fickle mind, Sri Krishna prescribes as the means *abhyāsa*, repeated practice, and *vairāgya*, detachment from things inimical to the goal. (6.35)

Sri Ramakrishna underlined the importance of practice after he saw a difficult circus feat.

There were exhibitions of various feats. A horse raced around a circular track over which large iron rings were hung at intervals. The circus rider, an Englishwoman, stood on one foot on the horse’s back, and as the horse passed under the rings, she jumped through them, always alighting on one foot on the horse’s back. The horse raced around the entire circle, and the woman never missed the horse or lost her balance.

When the circus was over, the Master and the devotees stood outside in the field, near the carriage. Since it was a cold night he covered his body with his green shawl.

Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: ‘Did you see how that Englishwoman stood on one foot on her horse, while it ran like lightning? How difficult a feat that must be! She must have practised a long time. The slightest carelessness and she would break her arms or legs; she might even be killed. One faces the same difficulty in the life of a householder. A few succeed in it through the grace of God and as a result of their spiritual practice. But most people fail. Entering the world, they become more and more involved in it; they drown in worldliness and suffer agonies of death. A few only, like Janaka, have succeeded, through the power of their austerity, in leading the spiritual life as householders. Therefore spiritual practice is extremely necessary; otherwise one cannot rightly live in the world.’⁷

Elsewhere, Sri Ramakrishna illustrates the yoga of practice through a commonplace incident in Kamarpukur, his birthplace. When someone said that it was extremely difficult to proceed towards God while leading the life of

a householder, Sri Ramakrishna remarked encouragingly :

What about the yoga of practice? At Kāmārpukur I have seen the women of carpenter families selling flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are while doing their business. The pestle of the husking-machine that flattens the paddy constantly falls into the hole of the mortar. The woman turns the paddy in the hole with one hand and with the other holds her baby on her lap as she nurses it. In the mean time customers arrive. The machine goes on pounding the paddy, and she carries on her bargains with the customers. She says to them, 'Pay the few pennies you owe me before you take anything more.' You see, she has all these things to do at the same time—nurse the baby, turn the paddy as the pestle pounds it, take the flattened rice out of the hole, and talk to the buyers. This is called the yoga of practice. Fifteen parts of her mind out of sixteen are fixed on the pestle of the husking-machine, lest it should pound her hand. With only one part of her mind she nurses the baby and talks to the buyers. Likewise, he who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God; otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of Death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.

3. Service to the Lord

Sri Krishna continues with the graded path: 'If you are incapable of constant practice, then devote yourself to My service. For even by rendering service to Me you will attain perfection.'⁹ Service to the Lord could mean external forms of worship like repetition of His name, singing His glories, observing vigils and fasts, showing reverence to His images and offering the Lord fruits, flowers, and so on.

Besides the above interpretation, service to God can also mean service to fellow beings looking upon them as manifestations of God. In fact, the entire universe is God's and all the activities that one is engaged in as a member of society are a form of service to God. A significant verse in the eighteenth chapter of the *Gītā*

makes the point very clear: 'From whom have come forth all beings and by whom is all this pervaded—by worshipping Him through the performance of his duty man attains perfection.'¹⁰ This verse is too clear, straightforward and inspiring to require a commentary.

Apart from this wide sense, God's work can also have a specific meaning. 'Work for a holy cause or for the cause of a divine incarnation is God's work in a special sense. Such a cause was given to mankind by Swami Vivekananda when he founded the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission as a vehicle for the spread of the teachings of the Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, and the service of Him through works consecrated to Him.'¹¹

4. Renouncing the Fruits of All Actions

For those who cannot engage themselves in God's work, Sri Krishna advocates yet another path: 'Take refuge in Me and thus controlling the mind, give up the fruits of all your actions.'¹² Giving up the fruits of actions implies giving up the feeling 'I am the doer of the action.' There are two more points to be noted here: taking refuge in the Lord and controlling the mind. No path to God is easy, whether it is of devotion, discrimination, selfless action or meditation. The common denominator in all these paths is self-discipline, mind control. Only, devotion to God makes it easier.

In other words, what is advocated is spiritualizing everyday life. Sri Krishna explains how to do this: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation in a sacrifice, whatever you gift to others, whatever austerities you perform—do them all as an offering unto Me. Thus you will become free from the bondage of the good and bad results of your actions. With your mind firmly set on renunciation, you will attain liberation and thereby come to Me.' (9.27-8)

Repeatedly offering one's actions and their results to God can bring about a change in the quality of actions. One can no longer af-

ford to be careless in one's actions, for they are to be offered to God. Though apparently easy, this path means a continual awareness of God. In other words, it means trying to follow the Lord's injunction '*māmanusmara yuddhya ca, remember Me and fight.*' (8.7)

There is an interesting incident related to remembrance of God amid one's activities. A novice of the Ramakrishna Order had this doubt: how can work and remembrance of the Lord be possible simultaneously? When he discussed the matter with a senior swami whom he revered, he asked the novice whether he was free for a while in the morning to clean the swami's room. The novice gladly agreed to this unsought opportunity for service. From the next day he had to sweep and wipe the swami's room clean, maybe after breakfast, when the swami briefly left the room for a stroll. One day, the swami missed the stroll for some reason and was standing outside the room when the novice was busy inside, cleaning. When he finished his job, the swami asked him whether he felt any change in the quality of his work that day. The novice said, 'Yes, Maharaj, I think I have cleaned the room today more thoroughly than usual.' When asked why, the novice said that since the swami was just outside the room he was aware of his presence all the time. That made him more careful in his work. The swami remarked, 'Now you must have got the answer to your question.' So awareness of God's presence and wholehearted performance *can* coexist, bettering in the process both the individual

and the quality of work. The novice had a valuable lesson that he cherishes to this day as a swami of the Order.

* * *

To recapitulate. God-realization is the goal of human birth. As long as the world and our own body and mind are real to us, meditation on the formless Reality is a difficult task. Surrendering the fruits of actions to God, doing God's work, repeated practice to make the mind dwell on God, unswerving meditation on God—these are the four tiers of devotion outlined in the *Bhagavadgītā*, forming a graded spiritual discipline. *

References

1. *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 3.8.
2. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 4.
3. David Godman, *Living by the Words of Bhagavan* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram Trust, 1994), 288.
4. *Bhagavadgītā*, 7.3.
5. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.3.12.
6. *ibid.*, 2.1.15.
7. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 154.
8. *ibid.*, 367-8.
9. *Gītā*, 12.10.
10. *ibid.*, 18.46.
11. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, trans. Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1988), 332.
12. *Gītā*, 12.11.

Have intense faith in Him. Then you will be free from all anxieties. He will bless you and protect you from all evils. Always keep your eyes fixed on Him and pray with childlike simplicity. Do not mind anything. Never be discouraged or disheartened, but live always cheerfully. Then through the blessings of the Lord you will rest in peace and bliss.

A sincere devotee is never at rest, but is constantly trying to be a little unselfish and to get a glimpse of purity, which is the foundation of every true character. ... Pray with your whole heart and soul to become unselfish and pure, because this is the only way to freedom.

—Swami Paramananda



Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago



October 1902

THE CALL OF INDIA

First comes the vision, then follows the fulfilment. Swami Vivekananda as a prophet and teacher foreshadowed a new awakening for India, a quickening of her pulses, a new light. He held aloft the banner of Truth and Action, and the battle cry of his life was given out in unfaltering tones. Work! It was an inciting call, and his enthusiasm was, and still should be, a source of strength to us all, encouraging us to bring about great results. From the seed sown by him is springing up a plant, which the youth of India should vigilantly foster, and endeavour carefully to mature. Let us show ourselves to be in accord with his leadings, and help to continue the work bequeathed by him to us, being quick to recognise the needs of our beloved India, and ever ready to lend a helping hand. We must see that no ground is lost by his death: that we in nothing go back; we must feel that religious freedom broadens and not narrows, and strive to maintain the highest ideals of the Indian race.

The Swami came in the great line of march of many heroic souls, in the footprints of Rishis and Saints. Every age brings forth philosophers with new attempts to explain the problem of existence, and he embodies the spirit of his age. ...

The Swami was particularly addressing himself to the youth of India. He urged them to extricate themselves from the meshes of indolence; to find out the meaning and significance of life; to arouse themselves to the realisation of their great possibilities, and see that a progressive future lay before them. He warned them that the world was an enchantress ever seeking to charm them into forgetfulness of the spiritual and eternal realities. As time passes, the pace of progress quickens; everywhere in India new ideas are fermenting.

Then what is there for you to do, you ask? Young men! India wants you! Zealous workers are needed everywhere. Action, is the imperative cry! Strong, resolute, loyal, unswerving help in ameliorating the condition of our people and promoting the betterment of our country. A blight seems to have fallen over our land, which has caused it physically to wither, approaching a state closely allied to suspended animation. Peculiar conditions of the people and country have concurred to cause the malady, but this weakness of constitution and want of vigour must be remedied, without loss of time. The main requisite is work, knowledge and enthusiasm, and a tremendous confidence in the self.

The soul is a sacred storehouse of heavenly wisdom and truth, and at the centre of every heart Truth lives. Many of us are in a state of spiritual etiolation, but can be restored to our true nature by exposure to divine light. Concentrate your best efforts to the cause of uplifting humanity by your thoughts and deeds, and let all of us who cling with undying affection to the glorious memorials of the ancient times, and the principles of the noble Vedanta, do our utmost to infuse new vitality and strength into our present apathetic condition, having an indomitable faith in an ideal future. Rise up to the latent potentialities of your nature, display the capacities that shall serve the ends you have in view, for human possibilities are of exalted character in spiritual unfoldment and power.

How rich in promise and opportunity is the period of youth! Standing on the threshold of life, making light of all obstacles on the road, they see years before them, like a country ripe for conquest. What a sense of infinite wealth do the intrepid spirits of youth possess in the gifts of inherent energy and strength, and in the outlook of an unexpended future! Reservoirs of knowledge are within you,

and vistas of light, that are yet undreamt of, will stream forth. All living truths must be characterised by intensity of purpose and singleness of mind. Much depends upon yourselves. Who can question that the spirituality of India in the future will greatly depend upon the opinions formed and the work accomplished by the men who are now in their youth? At all hazards, work! Be given to action rather than contemplation; be practical, instead of merely theoretical: execute, not merely discuss! It is by interior concentration on a desired object, the persistent ability to seize occasions, that the highest achievements become possible.

—A Western Disciple

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA MEMORIAL: AN APPEAL

At a public meeting held in Pachiappa's Hall on Friday, the 25th July, which was largely attended by the citizens of Madras, it was unanimously resolved: *That this meeting resolves to perpetuate the memory and continue the work of the late Swami Vivekananda by establishing an institution in this city for the study and propagation of Hindu Religion and Philosophy.*

Swami Vivekananda was one of the noble ... disciples of the great saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa now known throughout India and even in the West by his sayings and teachings which have been published from time to time. The Ramakrishna Mission founded by his disciples has been carrying on the noble work that was initiated by Swami Vivekananda in America after the Parliament of Religions of instructing the West in the teachings of the Vedanta and of awakening the East to a sense of its ancient greatness. The order of Sannyasins to which these disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa belong is the noblest in the world for the work of philanthropy untainted with any consideration for the promotion of selfish ends. ...

It was a dream of Swami Vivekananda's life that an organization should be formed with ramifications throughout the country to advance the spiritual and material needs of the people. Swami Vivekananda did not live to realise it in this life but he has bequeathed a legacy to his countrymen of noble work to be nobly performed. Shall we realise the magnitude of the task before us? ...

... Is it not time for us to awake and to be up and doing? In the great name of Swami Vivekananda, it has been resolved to found an institution in the City of Madras where Sannyasins who do not know whence the meal for the morrow comes will be housed and fed. Men will be trained to preach the Vedanta not for a salary or other remuneration but for the love of humanity. Pandits and scholars will be invited to assemblies periodically held for the discussion and elucidation of Vedantic truths. Agencies for the relief of the destitute poor and the instruction of the masses would be organised under the control of this institution. ... Funds will be needed for carrying out this noble undertaking. Shall we lack them in this land of a thousand charities? Devotion to duty, singleness of purpose and a faithful discharge of duty voluntarily undertaken must convince the people that their contributions will be well and nobly spent. An influential committee in whom it is believed the public will have entire confidence has been formed for starting and working the organisation. Already Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission like the revered Swami Ramakrishnananda, who has been working in our midst for the last 8 years instructing young men in the truths of the Vedanta and feeding the destitute from time to time, are ready for the work that lies before them. The reproach will be great if the opportunity is neglected. We trust our countrymen will rise to an adequate sense of greatness and utility of the task before them. Under the blessing of God and of the immortal sages of this ancient land success shall be ours! ...

—V Krishnasami Aiyar, BA, BL, High Court Vakil, Mylapore
G Venkataranga Rau, MA, Secretary to the Pachiappa's Trustees, Madras
G A Natesan, BA, Editor, The Indian Review, Esplanade, Madras

You Will Be a Paramahansa!

SWAMI SARVAGATANANDA

Part 2: Kankhal Sevashrama—The Early Stages

Swami Kalyananandaji was a monastic disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He came to the Baranagore monastery before Swamiji returned from America. Since Swamiji was not there, Kalyan Maharaj went to Holy Mother. He stayed with her and received her blessings. Other young men were also at the monastery, such as Swami Shuddhanandaji, another of Vivekananda's disciples. They had all been attracted by Swami Ramakrishnanandaji because he was there at the post, without going anywhere else. His brother disciples used to travel here and there, but Ramakrishnanandaji never left the monastery. He stayed rooted there, steadily worshipping Sri Ramakrishna. So the boys all gathered near him and he encouraged them to wait until Swamiji returned. Swamiji came in February 1897.

The Commission

When Swamiji gave sannyasa to Kalyan Maharaj in 1900, he asked, 'Well, Kalyan, what have you got to offer to your teacher as *guru-dakshina*?' Kalyan Maharaj stepped forward and said, 'Here I am. I offer myself to you. I am your slave; tell me anything, and I will do it.' Swamiji said, 'That is what I want. Go to Hardwar. I will give you some money. Buy a plot of land, clear the jungle and build some huts. Many pilgrims going to Hardwar suffer and die because they get no medical help. And nobody cares. When I was there, I had to go a hundred miles to Meerut to get a doctor. There is a hospital in Meerut, but not many can go there. So build something in Hardwar. If you find people suffering on the roadside, pick them up, bring them to the huts and treat

them. Forget Bengal! Don't come back! Go!' And so Kalyan Maharaj went. Swami Swarupanandaji, who was then in Mayavati, and Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj came to know about this. Swami Swarupanandaji collected some money and sent it to Kalyan Maharaj, and also visited him.

Early Days

Kalyananandaji purchased thirty acres of land. He could not get any land in Hardwar because it was already crowded with buildings and there was no open area. But between Hardwar and Kankhal, by the side of the Ganges canal, some open land, though wooded, was available. He bought the plot and started building his huts. People started wondering what he was up to. Kalyan Maharaj told them that he wanted to build a clinic so that people could get medical help. Some local people helped him, and he built nice huts: a big hut to receive patients and a small hut for himself.

During this time Swami Niranjananandaji Maharaj came to Hardwar. He was staying in a small *kutir* (hut) and came to know that Kalyan Maharaj was nearby. Niranjananandaji was a very strong man. He could raise heavy wooden beams with his hands and hold them in place till they were properly fixed. One day, Kalyan Maharaj told us, there was a huge beam lying on the ground that had to be lifted up, and he could not get any help. When Niranjananandaji came, he learnt that the beam needed to be fixed. He lifted it easily with Kalyan Maharaj's help and they fixed it. Thus Niranjananandaji did considerable work and helped Kalyan Maharaj. Niranjananandaji was then leading a quiet life, spending

most of his time in contemplation in his *kutir*, but now and then he would turn up to help Kalyan Maharaj. And whenever he came, he used to do these things unasked.

Swami Nischayanandaji came to Kankhal in 1904. After Swamiji's mahasamadhi he had been leading a wandering life, and his visit to Kankhal was unexpected. He saw that Kalyan Maharaj was alone and had to do ev-

[Maharaj] replied, 'Look, Sri Ramakrishna has given me a big estate. It is a big responsibility. Now I have to learn how to manage it. So I am here to seek his guidance and help.'

everything himself. (Swami Niranjananandaji Maharaj had died of cholera a few months before Nischayanandaji's arrival.) So Nischayanandaji decided to live with Kalyan Maharaj. He was another strong man with a very determined way of functioning and became a very good helper in every way. He used to bring food by begging for both Kalyan Maharaj and himself. At times this even took him as far as Rishikesh.

Brahmanandaji and Turiyanandaji

That very year Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj came to Kankhal from Belur Math. Except for the small huts there was nothing in which to accommodate him. The swamis themselves were trying to manage somehow or other. So when Maharaj arrived in Kankhal—all alone—they were surprised, because he had not informed them beforehand. 'Maharaj, what is the matter? What brings you here?' Well, he did not say anything in the beginning. He was like a prince at Belur Math, but when he came to Kankhal, there was little they could provide for him. So they had to prepare a nice place for him to stay in. Later, when Kalyan Maharaj asked Maharaj the reason for his visit, he replied, 'Look, Sri Ramakrishna has given

me a big estate. It is a big responsibility. Now I have to learn how to manage it. So I am here to seek his guidance and help.' He did not want to stay in Kankhal. Away from Hardwar, there was an small isolated village where sadhus would go to meditate. Maharaj had stayed there long back. He wanted to return there. But Kalyan Maharaj did not like this. He accompanied Maharaj to the place and told some friends there to help him.

Later on I asked Kalyan Maharaj, 'Did you ask what he planned to do, sitting there and meditating on the estate?' 'He wanted calm and quiet,' he replied, 'to live in a prayerful and contemplative attitude, to get some inspiration before going

back.' That was something very unusual. After spending some time thus, Maharaj returned to Belur Math quite a different person, very dynamic.

Later on I heard something more regarding why Brahmanandaji had come away from Belur Math. Swamiji had been a famous lecturer and big scholars used to come to talk with him. Maharaj was of a different type. He inspired people silently, in contemplation. Some Western disciples of Swamiji did not understand this and thought that Maharaj was not the right person for the job. They wanted him to go about and give lectures as Swamiji had done, whereas Maharaj wanted to quietly train some people, build up their spiritual character, and then send them out to work. He would say, 'Anybody can do ordinary work. But yours is not ordinary work; it is spiritual work. So prepare yourself first.' Any disciple going to him would first be told to 'sit down quietly and meditate.' All his disciples were trained like that. Later on Swamiji's foreign disciples understood that Maharaj's method too was very constructive.

A special chair had been made for Brahmanandaji to be used during his visits to Kankhal, and no one else was allowed to sit on it.

When I went there in 1935, the chair was still there. It was an old chair and had never been repainted. I did not yet know its story and one day told Kalyan Maharaj, 'This chair is in bad condition. Let us either get it repaired or do away with it.' 'Do away?' he asked in disbelief. 'This is the chair on which Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj sat!' Every morning before returning to his room from the shrine, Kalyan Maharaj used to touch the chair reverentially. Then I asked him, 'Can we just paint it a little bit? Varnish the surface?' He said, 'Yes, but don't hide it anywhere. Let it remain there.' So we cleaned it well, varnished it, and put up a note: 'Please do not use this chair.' Kalyan Maharaj told us that Brahmanandaji would come and sit there [though not physically present in Kankhal]; he had that feeling. So I never argued with him over these things.

Once Swami Turiyanandaji visited Kankhal. He had been staying in orthodox monasteries nearby. When he came to know that Kalyan Maharaj was there he came over to stay with him. Turiyanandaji was averse to luxury of any kind and used to say, 'I can stay anywhere.' Fortunately, he could now use the place they had prepared for Brahmanandaji. The area from the other side of the canal up to the Chandi Hill was all jungle. A wild bull used to roam about during the night, tearing up everything in its path. Whenever it came too near, Kalyan Maharaj and Nischayanandaji used to get up and do something to drive it away. During Turiyanandaji's stay, however, he would warn the swamis of the approaching bull well in advance: 'Hey, Kalyan, the bull is coming.' The swamis had a big drum which they would beat, and drive away the bull. This happened for a number of days. One day Kalyan Maharaj asked Turiyanandaji, 'Maharaj, don't you sleep at night? The

slightest sound seems to wake you up.' All Turiyanandaji said in reply was: '*Tomader moto noi, not like you people.*' Kalyan Maharaj recorded this remark in his diary.

After Kalyan Maharaj's demise, when I was asked to arrange his things, I came across this diary. Swami Jagadanandaji was there then, at the end of 1937. I said to him, 'Maharaj, I want to show you something. Kalyananandaji himself wrote in this diary something about Brahmanandaji's coming and about Turiyanandaji and the wild bull story. Turiya-

One day Kalyan Maharaj asked Turiyanandaji, 'Maharaj, don't you sleep at night? The slightest sound seems to wake you up.' All Turiyanandaji said in reply was: 'Tomader moto noi, not like you people.' Kalyan Maharaj recorded this remark in his diary.

nandaji says, "*Tomader moto noi, not like you people.*" What does it mean?" Swami Jagadanandaji said, 'He was different. He slept, no doubt, but he was still fully aware. Fully aware. We have noticed it. That is why he could hear the sound of the bull approaching. You know, Sri Ramakrishna once said, "I have put sleep to sleep." These great souls, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, are equally great.' Swami Jagadanandaji had lived with Turiyanandaji Maharaj and served him, so he knew what he was talking about.

Deprecation to Acceptance

To get back to our story. Swamis Kalyananandaji and Nischayanandaji thus slowly built up the whole hospital. At first it was small—just two or three huts—and the two swamis had to cope with many difficulties. Gradually they built some more huts as the number of patients increased. The only unfortunate thing was that the hospital was only for men. Not that women were discriminated

against. But since monks themselves served at the hospital, they could only admit male patients.

In those days the local monks called Kalyananandaji and Nischayanandaji *bhangi* sadhus (untouchables), because they rendered even menial service to patients. The two swamis had no servants and had to clean the filth at the hospital themselves, just like a mother cleanses her baby. So they were never invited to any festival organized by the local monastic community. It was like this until

[Dhanaraj Giri] told the gathering, 'You think you are all great sadhus. If there are any real sadhus here, it is these two. They lead a sterling life, serving the poor according to the ideal of Swami Vivekananda. That is the ideal for the modern age. They serve you when you are sick and yet you consider them to be bhangi sadhus! Are you not ashamed?'

around 1910. At that time, Dhanaraj Giri, a great monk and abbot of the Kailas Ashram of Sri Shankaracharya, was in Kankhal for a special function, and all the monks living nearby had gathered for a big feast. Dhanaraj Giri said, 'I have heard that Swami Vivekananda's disciples are somewhere here. I don't know if you know them.' 'Yes, they live close by, but they are no good. They are *bhangi* sadhus who do all sorts of work,' was the reply. 'What do they do?' he asked. 'They do even menial work.' 'Menial work? Where do you go when you become sick?' Dhanaraj Giri asked them. 'Don't you go there?' 'Yes, we do.' 'So you go to their hospital and receive treatment from them and yet call them *bhangi* sadhus? Go and invite them!' And he sent a monk to bring them.

Kalyan Maharaj was amicable, but Nischay Maharaj did not yield. He had been a mil-

itary man. He said, 'I am not going.' Kalyan Maharaj could not go alone without Nischayanandaji, so they did not go. The monk who came to invite them returned and reported that they were unwilling to attend the feast. Dhanaraj Giri sent the monk back. 'Tell them that I want them to come.' When he heard this, Kalyan Maharaj said, 'We should not offend Dhanaraj Giri. Let us go.' Nischay Maharaj said, 'Why? We don't depend upon them. Why should we go there? Today they will give you a big feast and tomorrow you will have the same dry bread.' So the messenger returned unsuccessful a second time. When he learnt that the swamis were still unwilling to come, Dhanaraj Giri sent his own secretary, who was himself a well-known sadhu, saying, 'You must bring them at any cost. Tell them that unless they come, there will be no feast here.' That was a bold statement. The sadhu went and requested Kalyan

Maharaj and Nischay Maharaj: 'He is very particular that you should attend the feast. Please do come. Unless you come he is not going to let the function proceed.' It was getting late; it was already 2:00 in the afternoon. Nischayanandaji still refused to go. Kalyan Maharaj had to persuade him: 'For the sake of Dhanaraj Giri we should go. He is a good monk and we ought to honour his invitation.' That seemed to soften Nischayanandaji a little, and they both went to the feast.

Dhanaraj Giri himself received them at the entrance, embracing them. He even made pranams to them! The assembled monks were shocked to see this. Dhanaraj Giri then led them inside and made them sit beside him on either side. He told the gathering, 'You think you are all great sadhus. If there are any real sadhus here, it is these two. They lead a sterling life, serving the poor according to the

ideal of Swami Vivekananda. That is the ideal for the modern age. They serve you when you are sick and yet you consider them to be *bhangi* sadhus! Are you not ashamed? When you were babies, who cleaned up your filth? Your mother did it. Do you call your mother a *bhangi* for that?' He scolded them severely and said to Kalyananandaji and Nischayanandaji, 'Forgive me for all the insults they have heaped on you.' He was begging forgiveness himself! Kalyan Maharaj and Nischay Maharaj said, 'Maharaj, please don't say such things. We didn't take the insults to heart anyway.' From then on the local sadhus accepted them. They would invite us and Kalyan Maharaj used to attend their functions. Things improved, fostering a good relationship.

Not only did orthodox sadhus of the area come to accept them, they even began to help the Sevashrama. A case in point: Over the years Nischayanandaji had collected some money for a marble image of Swami Vivekananda—a very small amount. Once when I was going through the accounts I came across the fund and asked Kalyan Maharaj what it was about. He said, 'Nischay wanted a marble image of Swamiji. See, he arranged this big place with that pedestal in the centre. On that he wanted to instal Swamiji's image. But he did not get enough money.' The fund then amounted to just about two thousand rupees. From then on I started augmenting the fund, adding to it any miscellaneous receipts. Eventually it added up to four or five thousand rupees. After I left for Karachi I learnt that they had merged that fund with the general fund. I told them, 'No, you have no right to do this. A great swami wanted an image for Swamiji. Let us honour his wish. Let the fund remain separate and let the interest

accumulate. Later on someone may execute the plan.' That was in 1944 or 1945. In the 1960s, when Swamiji's birth centenary was to be observed, the fund was rediscovered. Some local sadhus who had known Nischayanandaji and who knew us all said, 'We will collect more money for the image.' They did it and erected a beautiful marble image of Swamiji. This shows how the local sadhus were really devoted to our cause later on.

'This Is a Hospital First'

Swami Brahmanandaji visited Kankhal again in 1916 when a building was constructed for tuberculosis patients. It was a nice, big building with a large hall and had yet to be opened. Maharaj said, 'This is a beautiful

'Look here,' Kalyan Maharaj said, 'I have received donations from the public for a tuberculosis ward. I shall never use it for any other purpose. This building is meant only for patients. Maharaj's wish is there, no doubt. But more important is fulfilling the purpose for which you have collected the fund. This is a hospital first.'

building. Let us have Durga Puja here.' So Durga Puja was performed there and everybody enjoyed it. Afterwards Maharaj said, 'Kalyan, this is a good place for a shrine. People will come.' Kalyan Maharaj did not say anything. Maharaj also spoke about this to other swamis who were there, including his own disciple Swami Durganandaji, who had joined the Order at Kankhal. After Maharaj went away, two or three swamis reminded Kalyan Maharaj: 'Brahmanandaji wanted this building to be a shrine.' 'Look here,' Kalyan Maharaj said, 'I have received donations from the public for a tuberculosis ward. I shall never use it for any other purpose. This build-

ing is meant only for patients. Maharaj's wish is there, no doubt. But more important is fulfilling the purpose for which you have collected the fund. This is a hospital first.' So the building remained for the patients.¹

Mahatma Gandhi visited the Sevashrama in 1915, on his return from England after serving in the Boer War as a stretcher-bearer. He wrote in our visitors' book: 'Use indigenous drugs instead of imported drugs.' He was very particular about this. So Nischayanandaji began to look for some good ayurvedic medicines and would use them. One such medicine I always used for pneumonia patients. It was a paste made from boiling the bark of a tree. When applied, it would retain its heat for twenty-four hours. Before using this ayurvedic medicine, we used to apply an allopathic ointment which would last for just eight or ten hours before it was necessary to apply it again. We heard Nischayanandaji knew some of these things.

Brotherly Love and Reverence

Nischayanandaji and Kalyananandaji were very close. Though a little older than Kalyananandaji, Nischayanandaji obeyed him and held him in great reverence. That was something wonderful! When I went to Kankhal in 1935, I used to freely move about in Kalyan Maharaj's room. Some swamis did not approve of it and told me, 'You should not get

into his room like that. Even Nischayanandaji never entered his room; he would stand outside and talk with Kalyan Maharaj.'

Kalyan Maharaj was very devoted to Thakur, Ma and Swamiji—and of course to all the sadhus. But he was very silent. That was the difficulty. He seldom went out of his way to talk to anybody and was often mistaken by people who could not understand his actions. Ever since coming to Kankhal, he never went back to Belur Math even once. In 1937, when the Belur Math temple was almost ready and they wanted him to go there for Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, he asked me to go. But I said, 'I cannot go without you. They asked me to take you there.' Then I added, 'You are very stubborn, Maharaj. You don't even heed somebody's request.' On hearing me say 'You are very stubborn' he would just smile. 'Why don't you go to Belur Math?' I asked him. That was when he told the story of Swamiji's telling him to forget Bengal.

(to be continued)

Note

1. Around the time of Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary, someone from the government told us that we could not keep tuberculosis patients there along with other patients. The government had built a separate hospital for tuberculosis patients and we were no longer allowed to use our hospital for them.

An old rabbi was lying ill in bed and his disciples were holding a whispered conversation at his bedside. They were extolling his unparalleled virtues.

'Not since the time of Solomon has there been one as wise as he,' said one of them. 'And his faith! It equals that of our father Abraham!' said another. 'Surely, his patience equals that of Job,' said a third. 'Only in Moses can we find someone who conversed as intimately with God,' said a fourth.

The rabbi seemed restless. When the disciples had gone his wife said to him, 'Did you hear them sing your praises?' 'I did,' said the rabbi. 'Then why are you so fretful?' said his wife. 'My modesty,' complained the rabbi. 'No one mentioned my modesty!'

Education according to Vedanta

SWAMI PITAMBARANANDA

Part 2: The Process of Education

Before we discuss the process, method and means of education, we need to remember that in Vedanta everything is derived from the nature of the ultimate Truth. The implication is that the means is nothing but the reflection of the goal itself. The ultimate Truth is of the nature of homogeneous Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. This is also the real nature of the individual. This leads us to an important corollary.

All Knowledge Is Inside

In the words of Swami Vivekananda,

knowledge ... is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man 'knows', should, in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils'; what a man 'learns' is really what he 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge.

We say Newton discovered gravitation. Was it sitting anywhere in a corner waiting for him? It was in his own mind; the time came and he found it out. All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your own mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind. ... The falling of an apple gave the suggestion to Newton, and he studied his own mind. He rearranged all the previous links of thought in his mind and discovered a new link among them, which we call the law of gravitation.

All knowledge therefore, secular or spiritual, is in the human mind. In many cases it is not discovered, but remains covered, and when the covering is being slowly taken off, we say 'we are learning', and the advance of knowledge is made by this process of uncovering. The

man from whom this veil is being lifted is the more knowing man, the man upon whom it lies thick is ignorant, and the man from whom it has entirely gone is all-knowing, omniscient. ... Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out.¹

The Necessity of a Teacher

Swamiji continues:

But this ... does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.

This quickening impulse cannot be derived from books. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. ...

The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru—the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Shishya—the student.²

That is why the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says: 'To know that Reality he should go, with sacrificial faggots in hand, to a teacher alone, versed in the Vedas and absorbed in Brahman.'³

This raises a most important question: Who can be a teacher? But we shall take it up later while discussing teacher education.

The Ideal Method

Now we come to the method employed by the teacher in instructing the student. Let us first see how an ideal student is taught by direct application of the principles demonstrated above.

What follows is from the third chapter of the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*.

May He protect us (the teacher and the taught) together. May He nourish us both together. May we both acquire strength together. Let our study be brilliant. May we cherish no ill feeling towards each other. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

Bhṛgu, the well-known son of Varuṇa, approached his father with the request, 'O revered sir, teach me Brahman (the all-pervading Reality).' To him the father said: 'Food, vital force, eye, ear, mind, speech—these (are the aids to the knowledge of Brahman).' To him he (further) said: 'Crave to know well that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman.' He practised concentration. Having practised concentration,

(He) realized food (consciousness associated with matter) as Brahman. For it is verily from food that all these beings take birth, on food they subsist after being born, and they move towards and merge into food. Having realized that, he again approached his father Varuṇa with the request, 'O revered sir, teach me Brahman.' [He saw that food also is created, preserved and destroyed and hence cannot be the ultimate Reality.] To him he said: 'Crave to know Brahman well through concentration; concentration is Brahman.' He practised concentration. Having practised concentration,

(He) knew the vital force (consciousness associated with energy) as Brahman; for from the vital force, indeed, spring all these beings; having come into being, they live through the vital force; they move towards and enter into the vital force. Having known thus, [and because of the same logic as above] he again approached his father Varuṇa with the request, 'O revered sir, teach me Brahman.' To him he said: 'Crave to know Brahman well through concentration; concentration is Brahman.' He practised concentration. Having practised concentration,

(He) knew the mind (consciousness associated with the universal mind) as Brahman; for from the mind, indeed, spring all these beings; having been born, they are sustained by the mind; and they move towards and merge into

the mind. Having known that, he approached his father Varuṇa again and made the request, 'O revered sir, teach me Brahman.' To him he said: 'Crave to know Brahman well through concentration; concentration is Brahman.' He practised concentration. Having practised concentration,

(He) knew knowledge (self-awareness in the Universal) as Brahman; for from knowledge, indeed, spring all these beings; having been born, they are sustained by knowledge; they move towards and merge in knowledge. Having known that, he approached his father Varuṇa again with the request, 'O revered sir, teach me Brahman.' To him he said: 'Crave to know Brahman well through concentration; concentration is Brahman.' He practised concentration. Having practised concentration,

(He) knew Bliss (Unity) as Brahman; for from Bliss, indeed, all these beings originate; having been born, they are sustained by Bliss; they move towards and merge in Bliss. This knowledge realized by Bhṛgu and imparted by Varuṇa terminates in the Supreme, established in the cavity of the heart. He who knows thus becomes firmly established.⁴

The first point to be carefully noted here is that the teacher and the student pray together. Let us understand what it means. The teacher has discovered the universal Absolute to be his own Self and as the Self of all, including the student. It is this knowledge which he wishes to impart or transmit to the student. Rather he wishes to awaken the knowledge in him by removing the coverings. The channel of communication also has to be love, which again is the expression of the Reality common to them. Hence this joint prayer. Commenting on the last part of the prayer, 'May we cherish no ill feeling towards each other', Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, 'There is occasion for ill feeling on the part of the student in the matter of learning, as also on the part of the teacher, consequent on unwitting lapses.'⁵ This prayer forestalls any such ill feeling. For, according to Vedānta *unhindered love and mutual respect are the key factors in the process called education*.

We see how the ideal process of educa-

tion is revealed here: First, Varuṇa placed some data before Bhṛgu, gave a definition to guide him to think and hinted at concentration as the means to acquire knowledge. Second, Bhṛgu caught the hint, got an answer, but was not satisfied with it and hence referred back to the teacher. Third, the teacher in turn confirmed concentration as the means, saw that the student's search was in the right direction and encouraged him to proceed further till the definition could be pushed no further. And fourth, the Upanishad chooses to call this process by the name of the taught and the teacher and also declares it to be available for all.

While commenting on the above passage Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, 'Thus becoming pure in mind through concentration ... Bhṛgu penetrated into the subject by degrees and ... realized the innermost Bliss as Brahman.'

Concentration the Main Ingredient in the Process of Education

Let us concentrate a little more on 'concentration' as the means to acquire knowledge. According to Swami Vivekananda there is only one method to acquire knowledge: concentration.

The world is ready to give up its secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow comes through concentration.⁶

To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collection of facts. If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument, collect facts at will. (6.38-9)

From the lowest man to the highest yogi, all have to use the same method [to acquire knowledge]; and that method is what is called concentration. The chemist who works in his laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind, brings them into one focus, and throws them on the elements; the elements stand analysed, and thus his knowledge comes. The astronomer has also concentrated the powers of his mind and brought them into one focus; and he throws

them on to objects through his telescope; and stars and systems roll forward and give up their secrets to him. So it is in every case—with the professor in his chair, the student with his book—with every man who is working to know. ... The more this power of concentration, the more knowledge is acquired. ... This is the one call, the one knock, which opens the gates of Nature, and lets out floods of light. This, the power of concentration, is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge. (2.390-1)

The practice of meditation even with some trifling external object leads to mental concentration. (6.486)

With these observations let us revert to the original text, which was translated as 'He practised concentration.' The original text in the Upanishad is '*Sa tapo'tapyata*', which could literally mean 'He mortified his body with meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial.' Quoting from the *Mahābhārata* in his commentary on this text, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, "'Concentration of the mind and the senses is the highest *tapas*' for that forms the door to the knowledge of Brahman.'

How do the organs come into play? The student is keen on not only analytically thinking of the Reality and feeling it, but is also eager to see it, sense it in every way. And this effort to discover the universal Absolute hidden behind the ever-changing phenomenal world of 'I' and 'you' and names and forms, may be called concentrated meditation. It involves (i) analytical thinking and (ii) devotional feeling or loving absorption which takes a student deeper and deeper with (iii) a will or determination to know, together with (iv) the application of the power of restraint, not allowing the mind or the senses to pull him outside in various directions. Usually, the ever-changing external world of varied forms drags our mind and organs towards itself and makes the mind scattered. The search for the unchanging, single and universal Reality on the other hand requires the exact opposite: to collect the mind and the senses to one focus, concentrate and make them penetrate the appearance in search

of the Reality. That is meditation. And through this meditation Bhrgu reached the goal of education under the infallible guidance of his teacher.

We understand the imperative need of meditation to acquire knowledge from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. Students discussing Brahman discuss all possible causes of the universe: 'Should time, inherent nature, necessity, chance, the elements, the individual soul, be regarded as the cause? The cause could not be the combination of these entities, since there is the individual soul, for whose the combination has been made. The individual soul too cannot be the cause because it is dependent on joy and sorrow.'⁷ During this process they clearly found the deficiency of intelligence in arriving at a conclusive answer.

Commenting on the text Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, 'After having thus demolished the different views, and not finding another means to determine the Entity that defies all other means of realization, they themselves realized the supreme primary Source by practising the yoga of meditation.' The Upanishad declares it thus: 'By practising the yoga of meditation they discovered the [creative] power of the Lord Himself, hidden in his own *guṇas*.'⁸

Different Methodologies for Different Aptitudes

Though the method of concentrated meditation may be available for all, can everyone really benefit from it? Are all fit for it? If the student does not have the capacity for such concentrated meditation, what does he do? Obviously, the teacher has to devise methods and means to bring the ever-active mind of the student to a serene state to help him to develop the capacity for meditation. According to Vedānta the universal Absolute is the one Self behind all, but each individual is differently or uniquely constituted. Thus, though the goal—realization of the universal absolute Reality as their own real Self—is the same for all,

the starting points and methods of approach necessarily vary for different people. This we clearly see demonstrated in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, where several methods are mentioned for acquisition of the same true Knowledge. Let us examine one such to convince ourselves of this variety. What follows is from the fourth chapter of the Upanishad.

Once upon a time, [a boy named] Satyakāma Jābāla addressed his mother Jābālā, 'Mother, I wish to live the life of a celibate in a teacher's house. Of what lineage am I?' She said to him: 'O my son, I do not know of what lineage you are. I got you in my youth when I was busy performing many duties, and attending on others. Having been such I could not know about your lineage. But my name is Jābālā and your name is Satyakāma. So speak of yourself as Satyakāma Jābāla.'

He went to Haridrumata Gautama and said, 'May I approach your venerable self, O revered sir, to live with you as a celibate.' Gautama asked him, 'To what lineage, my dear boy, do you belong?' He [repeated his conversation with his mother and] said, 'Sir, I am Satyakāma Jābāla.' Gautama told him, '... Fetch faggots for sacrifice, my dear boy. I shall initiate you as a *brahmacārīn*, for you did not deviate from truth.' After initiating him (in the process of meditation and the like) he sorted out four hundred lean and weak cows and said, 'Dear boy, follow them.' Driving them towards the forest Satyakāma said, 'I shall not return till [the herd becomes] a thousand.'

He lived away for many years. When the cattle had increased to a thousand, a bull addressed him, 'O Satyakāma.' He responded, 'Yes, revered sir.' 'Dear boy, we have become one thousand. Lead us to the house of the teacher.'

(The bull said,) 'I wish to instruct you about one foot of Brahman.' (Satyakāma said,) 'Please instruct me, revered sir.' The bull said to him, 'The eastern side is one part, the western side is one part, the southern side is one part, the northern side is one part. This indeed, my dear boy, is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four parts and called the Radiant. ... Fire will tell you of one foot of Brahman.'

At the dawn of the next day he drove the

cattle towards the teacher's house. By evening at the place where the cows came together, he kindled the fire, penned the cows, laid the fuel near the fire and sat down behind the fire, facing east. The fire addressed him, 'Dear Satyakāma, ... let me instruct you about one foot of Brahman.' 'Please instruct me, revered sir.' The fire said to him, 'The earth, the intermediate space, the heaven and the ocean are the four parts. O good looking one, this indeed is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four parts and called the Limitless. ... The swan will tell you of one foot.'

At the dawn of the next day he drove on the cattle. Towards evening at the place where the cows came together, he kindled the fire, penned the cows, laid the fuel near the fire and sat down behind the fire, facing east. The swan flew to him and addressed him, 'Dear Satyakāma, I wish to instruct you about one foot of Brahman. 'Please instruct me, revered sir.' The swan said, 'Fire, the sun, the moon and lightning are the four parts. O good looking one, this indeed is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four parts and called the Effulgent. ... Madgu, the aquatic bird, will speak of one foot.'

At the dawn of the next day he drove on the cattle. Towards evening at the place where the cows came together, he kindled the fire, penned the cows, laid the fuel near the fire and sat down behind the fire, facing east. Madgu flew to him and said 'O Satyakāma, ... I wish to instruct you about one foot of Brahman. 'Please instruct me, revered sir.' The bird said, 'The vital force, the eye, the ear and the mind are four parts. O good looking one, this indeed is one foot of Brahman, consisting of four parts named the Repository (possessed of an abode).'

He reached the teacher's house. The teacher addressed him, 'Dear boy Satyakāma, you shine like a knower of Brahman. Who is it that has instructed you?' He assured him saying, 'Beings other than humans. But I would like you, revered sir, to expound it to me. I have heard from venerable ones like you that knowledge acquired from the teacher alone becomes the most beneficial.' The teacher taught him the same thing. And nothing was omitted; yes, nothing was omitted.⁹

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya makes the following observations: (i) The story shows that faith and austerity are accessories of meditation on Brahman; and (ii) A knower of Brahman is possessed of tranquil organs and a smiling face. He is without care and contented. Therefore the teacher said 'You shine like a knower of Brahman.'

A word on the differing methodologies. Bhṛgu and the students in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* on the one hand and Satyakāma on the other differ greatly in their family backgrounds. Even so is the difference in their capacity to assimilate the teaching. Bhṛgu took hints from the teacher, introspected by himself, penetrated layer after layer of his mind through powerful, concentrated meditation and arrived at the Truth, guided by his teacher. So did the other students after they reached the limits of analytical reasoning. Satyakāma might not have had that purity and transparency of mind, but had perfect faith, sincerity of purpose, devotion and the capacity to translate them into loving service. These helped him in his meditation. He too reached the goal but by a different method. But despite the differing methodologies, meditation seems to be a factor common to both.

(to be continued)

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3. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.2.12.
4. *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 3.1.1-6.
5. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.3.19; *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.
6. *CW*, 1.130.
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8. *ibid.*, 1.3.
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Unpublished Photographs

Two unpublished photographs of Swami Vivekananda were discovered at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, in April 2002.

The photographs appear to be donated by Ms Ida Ansell (Ujjvala), a devotee who transcribed some of Swami Vivekananda's talks in San Francisco in 1900. Ujjvala used to visit our Hollywood centre in the 1940s and finally moved there in 1950. She left behind a trunk of personal belongings to the centre when she died in 1955. Her materials were sorted in a preliminary manner for storage in the centre's archives about 25 years ago.

When Swami Krishnananda, one of the centre's monks, passed on in 1997, he left behind an enormous collection of materials documenting the history of the Vedanta Society of Southern California and a generous monetary gift to preserve it. Thanks to his dedication, the centre was able to hire a suitable person to sort

and catalogue over 300 trunks of materials. The photographs of Swamiji were discovered as the Vedanta Society's general archives and Swami Krishnananda's collection began to be integrated this year.

The original photographs found glued onto photo boards are still in excellent condition. They are being stored for safe keeping in the centre's archives. No descriptive information is found on the photos about the date or the circumstances surrounding the origin of the photos. Assuming that they might be new discoveries, the centre printed both of them in their newsletter, *Vedanta Voices*. Since then, we have heard from several researchers who believe the photographs were probably taken in San Francisco in 1900, and concur that Ujjvala is the most likely source of the photos.

Prabuddha Bharata is happy to reproduce these photographs in the following two pages.

'Break through the Bondage of Maya'

One day [Swami Turiyananda] asked Ida, who was now known as Ujjvala, the 'shining one': 'Are you deep or shallow? Do you live and die in words, or do you live and die in principles?' She could not immediately answer. Then the Swami added. 'In matters of opinion swim with the current; in matters of principle stand firm as a rock.' Ujjvala said later that in these few words she had been given guidance for a lifetime. 'Be yourself, be strong,' the Swami continued. 'Realization is only for those who are strong, pure, and upright. Remember that you are the Atman. That gives the greatest strength and courage. Be brave; break through the bondage of Maya. Be like a lion; don't tremble at anything! Swamiji has taught you that every soul is potentially divine. Realize your own divinity, then you will realize that all souls are divine.' These words he often repeated.

—Swami Turiyananda, 67





General, Particular and Holy Mother

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

There is a beautiful incident in Swami Saradananda's life. The big question was who should succeed Swami Yogananda in serving Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The question was significant, considering the sensitivity of Holy Mother's household. With his failing health Swami Yogananda found it increasingly difficult to continue serving Holy Mother.

But Swami Yogananda's successor was selected long before he left his field. Swami Saradananda once said to him, 'Yogin, I can't really follow all that Naren (Swami Vivekananda) says. In what a diversity of moods he talks! Whatever standpoint he takes up, he makes so much of it that the others pale into insignificance.' Yogananda said, 'I tell you one thing, Sarat, you cling to the Mother; whatever she says will be right.' Not stopping there, he took him to the Mother. And in this way Saradananda gradually got the privilege of serving the Mother.¹

Swami Saradananda was voicing the opinion of many of his times and of the future. It is indeed difficult to comprehend Swamiji and his ideas, many feel. Let us go to Sri Ramakrishna straightaway then. Yes, we can. But to comprehend an avatara is not given to one and all. Sri Ramakrishna's words, as recorded in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, are no doubt simple, but Swamiji himself remarks that one can discuss each statement of Sri Ramakrishna for a long time; such is the depth of his apparently simple words.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi seems to appeal easily to everyone. The rustic and the scholar, the unlettered helper boy and the professor of philosophy—all appear to understand her and approach her with understanding and affection. She too is an avatara. She too hid her divinity, perhaps with an unparalleled

zeal. She too had stunning supernatural experiences. But, all the same, she appears simple, our own, an easy-to-approach mother. What could be the secret?

One sacred reason is the holy trust Sri Ramakrishna bequeathed to her. She said regarding this: 'The Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that motherhood to the world.'² A mother is always one's own. Children feel free with their mothers.

There could be several more reasons for Holy Mother's appeal. Here is one such.

The General-Particular Theory

Several Western philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and John Locke have discussed the theory of the general and the particular. All things we see around us are particulars, but we can group these particulars into some generalities. For instance, there are Rama, Krishna, Hari and a million other men. Seeing their similarities, we can call them by the general name 'men'. Indian philosophy too discusses this idea.

In the field of religion and spirituality too there is something called general and particular. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam—all this can be called 'religion' in a general way, though there are essential differences between them. It is in this general-particular field that we can see a reason for Holy Mother being so very near and dear, while Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are apparently incomprehensible.

Sri Ramakrishna: From Particular to General

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual life began with his worship of Mother Kali. He panted

for Her vision, and She bestowed the vision to him when it had become impossible for him to live without Her. After this vision, Ramakrishna forged ahead in spiritual life, practising sadhana through various other paths. For instance, he worshipped Rama, Krishna, Christ and others; he practised various spiritual moods; he practised Islam and other faiths; he followed the ideals set by almost all religious groups. Finally he came to the conclusion 'As many faiths, so many paths.' In other words, God is one, His manifestations are many.

Swami Vivekananda: From General to Particular

Swami Vivekananda began his spiritual journey seeking the vision of God. He did not belong to any particular denomination, and at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he became world-famous, he spoke of Hinduism and Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism, and the harmony of all faiths. Towards the end of his life, however, he was all Mother. Nothing remained then but Mother. He wrote in one of his most wonderful letters: 'Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance the thirst for power! Now they are vanishing, and I drift. I come! Mother, I come!' ³ He repeatedly wrote to Nivedita in the same strain: 'Mother knows, as I always say. Pray to Mother.'⁴

Holy Mother: The Universal

While Sri Ramakrishna went from the 'particular', the Divine Mother, to the 'general', the practice of all religions, Swamiji went from the 'general', the harmony of all religions, to the 'particular', the Divine Mother. Such tremendous expansions and contractions in the spiritual field make ordinary souls

dizzy. Hence it appears, *as it were*, that the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are difficult to comprehend.

But what was Holy Mother's spirituality? It was neither particular nor general. It was only universal: it was all Sri Ramakrishna. As someone remarked, Holy Mother is the strongest propagator of the Ramakrishna ideal. Holy Mother began with the worship of Ramakrishna and ended with the worship of Ramakrishna. While the graphs of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda seem to rise and fall, that of Holy Mother is a single, straight, thick line. Even a child can understand a straight line, whereas a mathematician is required to explain complex graphs. Thus Swamiji may need interpretation and Sri Ramakrishna too may need interpretation. But Holy Mother needs no interpretation: she needs only a simple call: 'O Mother!'

They say spiritual life is simple. Spiritual truths have to be so simple that even a child can understand them. This is true of spiritual ideals too. For are we not all children so far as spiritual ideas are concerned? So a Holy Mother, with her astonishingly down-to-earth life, shines before us as an easily approachable ideal. What about Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji then? Are the three really different? *

References

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Be devoted to God and take shelter at His feet. It is enough to remember that there is someone—call Him Father or Mother—who is always protecting you.

—Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

The Vedic Concept of God in All Its Aspects

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

From the most ancient times man¹ all over the world has conceived of a powerful being or beings, supernatural or quasi-supernatural, controlling the affairs of the world. These conceptions have varied from time to time, and from clime to clime, but the basic idea of a powerful controller has remained, whether conceived crudely or in a refined manner. It was man's inherent curiosity to understand himself and his environment, and his need for physical and psychological succour in a strangely hostile and benevolent environment, that gave rise to a conception of God. These are the factors again which have stimulated his enquiry into the nature of God and His relationship to the universe and its beings. These conceptions of God have evolved over the ages simultaneously with the growth in the knowledge of man about himself and the surrounding nature, and influenced by social and political developments.

Primitive Conceptions

In the beginning, conceptions of God were of the character of just response to stimuli from external environment—in other words, instinctive. Because they were instinctive, the primitives at times had profound intuitive glimpses of Truth, which they could not fully understand or rationally formulate. They could not separate them from other crude tribal conceptions at the intellectual level. But they gave very direct and forceful expressions to these glimpses.

However, God's existence was assumed, based on faith that was never questioned. A conscious enquiry into God as the cause of the universe sets in at a much later stage, and that again in only some parts of the world and some civilizations. For the rest, conceptions of

God rested on the stimuli-response basis, sometimes reinforced by sublime mystic insights and prophetic utterances. As such they could not have any universal rational appeal or philosophical and scientific value. They had only religious value to the followers of different cults and faiths, affording them psychological and emotional satisfaction. Even where a rational enquiry was instituted, in most cases such enquiries could not get free from the hold of religious theology. They often got involved in religious terminology and symbolism, and gradually relapsed into dogmatic and credal sectarian views, because passions and prejudices—racial, tribal, or national—prevented the growth of a universal vision.

Three Stages in the Conception of God

In the early stage, we find that man and his world are the central theme of the picture, and the God who created them intervenes physically in the affairs of humans. He has all the qualities of goodness and failings of humans, only on a large scale, but is powerful. The anthropomorphic conceptions of humans, their desires and passions, cling to him. He has a definite form, has an abode, has human qualities and is moved by hatred and jealousy, has likes and dislikes, favours some and pours his wrath on others. He has his sons, daughters, angels, prophets, chosen people, and so on. And Satan opposes him. He is like a powerful autocratic king who does not brook other gods or any opposition.

It is only at a later stage that man tries to shed his anthropomorphism and gradually rises to a purer conception of God as the source, sustenance and refuge of the whole universe and all its beings, human or non-hu-

man. God is divine. In Him all things, animate and inanimate, live, move and have their being, and He loves all His creation equally. But, He is still a person based on faith, and generally male.

At the third stage, man shifts from human-centred conceptions of Personal God to Truth-centred philosophical enquiry. God sheds even His 'He'-ness and remains as the Truth and ground of the phenomenal universe, the infinite impersonal spiritual Reality in all Its glory, inspiring the functioning of the universe and its beings from within, and receiving their homage as the Source. It is the home to which all will return in the end for rest. The final rest is achieved when the individual being realizes its unity and identity with the universal Reality. This also means cessation of all outward movements. There is no duality in the Infinite, and hence no movement, no want, no fear or sorrow: 'What delusion, what sorrow can there be to him who realizes the oneness of all Existence?'² It is 'Peace that passeth understanding'; *parā shānti* (supreme Peace); *moksha* (freedom from all limitations); and *nirvāṇa* (cessation from all phenomena).

The Uniqueness of Vedic Conceptions

We find all these three types of conception of God—especially the second and third stages—reflected in the Vedic literature. Yāska, an ancient Vedic etymologist, classifies them in his *Nirukta*: the anthropomorphic or natural (*ādhi-bhautika*), the divine or supernatural (*ādhi-daivika*), and the philosophical or transcendental (*ādhyātmika*), culminating in the highest conception of the absolute spiritual Infinite (*nirguṇa* Brahman) in Vedānta or the Upanishads, which form the last portion of the Vedas.

In comparison with the conceptions of God in other parts of the world, the conceptions in the Vedic literature—the earliest extant living literature in the world—are unique in that a sort of enquiry or conscious quest is

associated with them from the very beginning. They are not mere groping apprehensions or instinctive beliefs. The conceptions posited of a Personal God are often questioned and analysed deliberately. Progressively new solutions are offered to overcome logical difficulties and to satisfy psychological and emotional needs.

Another line of enquiry runs parallel to these conceptions to meet the philosophical requirements of Truth and the actual existence of a supreme divine Being. These two conceptions—religious and philosophical, the Personal God (*deva*) and the Impersonal Reality (*sat*)—run parallel, meet, intermingle, and coalesce. As reflected in all Hindu thought, all through the Vedic literature the approach to problems is synthetic and comprehensive. The approach is inclusive and not exclusive, taking care not to leave any loose ends. The conception of God leads to the conception of the absolute Reality (Brahman). Again, God is derived from and treated as the phenomenal manifestation of the absolute Reality, giving God thus an existential status. They are two aspects of one and the same Reality, Brahman (the infinite spiritual Reality): 'Dual are the manifestations of Brahman, the formed one and the formless one.'³ They are the *saguṇa* (phenomenal or with attributes) and the *nirguṇa* (noumenal or absolute) aspects of one Brahman. *Saguṇa* Brahman is Personal God, the Creator and Lord of the universe (Īshvara), possessed of all divine qualities; and *nirguṇa* Brahman is the pure spiritual Ground of the universe, which gives substance to the universe and makes its manifestation possible.

To be more accurate, Brahman, the single Reality, appears to us in Its phenomenal aspect as God, universe, and the living beings, while remaining all the time as the impersonal Reality, their essence and substratum. Brahman is called Īshvara when thought of with *maya* or *prakṛiti*, Its inherent, creative, divine Power.⁴ In other words, when the creative, divine Power *maya* is kinetic as *prakṛiti*, Brah-

man is seen as Īshvara. It is this divine Power again which manifests as the universe on the substratum of Brahman.⁵ And according to the Vedic thought this phenomenal appearance of the universe is evolutionary in character,⁶ with God presiding (*adhyaksha*) over and evolving it⁷ through cosmic law and order in terms of Truth (*ṛta* and *satya*).⁸ *Satya* (derived from *sat*, Existence, Truth, Reality) is never haphazard; It is always perfect and orderly, and the path to the Divine is paved with Truth.⁹ Hence law, order and reason are inherent in the universe, and these are also the means through which we can discover the Truth or Reality.¹⁰

Nature and Definition of God

In Vedanta, therefore, God should not be taken merely as an extra-cosmic Creator¹¹ of the universe, creating the universe out of nothing by an act of will, as in Semitic religions. Neither is God a mere *He*. He is both personal and impersonal. *He* is only a convenient description to show that God is a conscious being (*chaitanya*) and not an inert existence (*jaḍa*). As such God can be equally described as *She* or *It*, and can be thought of in all relationships such as father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, master, lord, friend, and even as enemy (in the case of Rāvaṇa, for example), to establish emotional communion with the Divine to suit one's nature. From different standpoints God in Vedanta is extra-cosmic, intra-cosmic and supra-cosmic—as the pure non-dual absolute Reality, in relation to which no relativity or any touch of duality can be posited.¹² He is also transcendental and acosmic (*nishprapancha*).

God is also the infinite spiritual Reality (Brahman) from which the universe emerges, in which it rests, and into which it merges back, leaving no trace behind, like waves in the sea. The *Taittirīya Upanishad* defines Brahman precisely in this manner.¹³ The universe is not something apart from God, either in substance or in existence.¹⁴ God is to be medi-

tated upon as the *tajjalān* in silence, says the *Chāndogya Upanishad*.¹⁵ It is the same idea as in the *Taittirīya*, but put in an aphoristic formula, using the first syllables of the words: *Tasmin jāyate liyate aniti* (That in which the universe is born, in which it merges, in which it vibrates/breathes/lives). The *Vedānta Sūtras* begin the enquiry into the nature of God or Brahman (*athāto brahma-jijnāsā*) with this very definition: '*Janmādi asya yataḥ*, That from which the origin and so on of this manifested universe.'

Evolution of the Concept of God in the Vedas

After this brief introduction, we shall now try to trace the evolution of the conception of God in Vedanta from the early Vedic times. By this we do not mean any chronological development of the conception, but only logical and psychological, since the various conceptions overlap from the earliest period from time to time. Just as in modern times too various conceptions of God exist side by side, even at that time they existed side by side. In historic times too among Vedantic systems the subtle philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism) came first to prominence, next Vishishtādvaita (qualified non-dualism) and then Dvaita (dualism), to spread it among the common people. It is also said that Krishna Dvaipāyana Vyāsa collected and rearranged the Vedic hymns (*saṁhitās*) in ancient times and classified them into the present four Vedas to serve different purposes. So we can only seek to trace a logical, and not a chronological, evolutionary process in the Vedic literature.

(a) *Vishvakarman*: The first logical conception of God in the Vedic literature is that of Vishvakarman ('the architect and builder of the universe'): 'Who is our Father, our Creator, maker; Who every place doth know and every creature. By Whom alone to gods their names were given; to Him all creatures go, to ask Him.'¹⁶ He builds the universe, just as a carpenter builds a house from wood (as in

early times). But, then, questions arose: Where was the material for the building? Where were the living beings? Does He evolve these things out of Himself? 'At the time of creation what was His basis? How and whence did He start creation, the great Vishvakarman, the Seer of all? How could He extend the sky above and the earth below? His eyes are everywhere, His face is everywhere, and He is of all hands and of all feet. He, that one God, moves His hands and wings [imagination] and creates the sky and earth. What was that forest and what was that tree (material) out of which have been manufactured the earth and sky? O wise ones, enquire into these in your mind and realize on what basis He created the universe.'¹⁷

(b) *Hiranyagarbha*: The enquiry was made and we come across the next conception of God as the *Hiranyagarbha*, He who has the luminous germ of the universe (*hiranya* = [brilliant like] gold; *garbha* = womb, foetus, germ). That is, Mahat or the cosmic Intelligence has the germ of the universe within Himself (as it were in His womb). This could be compared to the hen's having the egg within itself, created out of its own body. This cosmic germ or egg (*aṇḍa*) comes out of *Hiranyagarbha*, evolves and manifests as the universe with all its beings. *Hiranyagarbha* is also known as *Brahmā* (the great Creator), and the universe is His cosmic egg, called *brahmāṇḍa*. *Prajāpati*, the Lord of creatures, is also one of the epithets of *Hiranyagarbha*/*Brahmā*.

In the beginning *Hiranyagarbha* alone flourished and He was the Lord (*pati*) of all that was born. This earth He settled firm, and heaven established. He is the giver of life and strength, whom all gods and beings worship and obey; whose light and shade are life and death; ... who by His own glory is the one Lord of all that breathes and is their ruler. ... What other God than He shall we adore with oblations?¹⁸

When it develops into a chicken the egg resembles its parent. Similarly, *Hiranyagarbha* also must have a similarity to the universe. As such, He is called *Virāt* in His cosmic

form. He is *Brahmā*, the vast. From different functional points of view *Hiranyagarbha* is called differently, such as *Virāt*, *Brahmā*, *Mahat*, *Mahān Ātman*, *Sūtrātman* and *Prāṇa*. Just as the hen is both outside the egg, and again is potentially in the egg, *Hiranyagarbha* also is both within and without the universe and encompasses it as well. He is extra-cosmic, and also intra-cosmic. That is, He is within the cosmos as *Mahat* and the cosmos is within Him as *Mahat* in a subtle, germ form. The seed is in the tree, and the tree is in the seed in a subtle form.

(c) *Purusha*: But like the hen and its egg, which develops into the chicken, do the two, *Hiranyagarbha* and the universe, exist separately? Then, where do they exist? Or is *Hiranyagarbha* immanent only and is exhausted in the universe? And such other questions begin to impinge on the mind. The answer, already latent in the conception of *Hiranyagarbha*, is made explicit in the conception of the *Purusha* (the supreme Being). When the conception of the *Purusha* arose, sometimes *Hiranyagarbha* was considered as proceeding from the *Purusha*,¹⁹ and evolving the universe from within as its inner soul or *Sūtrātman*.²⁰

The 'Purusha-Sūkta' declares:

All this universe and its beings are only a part, a quarter of the *Purusha*; three quarters of the *Purusha* transcends all manifestation (*Pādo-asya vishvā bhūtāni tripādasya amritam divi*). All this whatever exists is *Purusha* only, whatever was in the past and whatever will appear in the future (*Purusha evedam sarvam yat bhūtam yat cha bhavyam*). It is a reflection of His glory (*Etāvān asya mahimā*); He far excels His glory (*Ato jyāyāmscha pūrushaḥ*). The *Virāt* is born from the *Purusha*—the manifested cosmic universe (*Tasmāt virāt ajāyata*).²¹

Like waves in the sea the universe arises from the *Purusha*. The waves are only a small part on the surface and the vast sea beneath is waveless, and is the support and substance of the waves. The wave form is only a condition or state of the sea, and not a separate thing in

itself apart from the sea.

In these three conceptions of Vishvakarman, Hiranyagarbha and the Purusha, we have the conceptions of God as extra-cosmic, intra-cosmic and supra-cosmic, and as the source of the universe. Vishvakarman is extra-cosmic, standing outside the universe and building it as it were; Hiranyagarbha is both extra-cosmic and intra-cosmic. The universe is part and parcel of Him, and though manifesting outside of Him, it comes out of His own being and is similar to Him in being and nature. It is not something separate from Him. Nor is He separate from it; He is the Virāt, He activates it from within as the cosmic Energy (*prāṇa*) or cosmic Ego (*mahān ātman*). Purusha is supra-cosmic and is the source of the universe. The universe is only a part of His glory and is not an entity different from Him; it is like the sun and its rays, the sea and its waves. We may note that Vishvakarman is personal; Hiranyagarbha is cosmic and personal; and Purusha is supra-cosmic and personal-impersonal, which later on paves the way to the conception of the absolute impersonal Advaita.

(d) *Aditi and Vāk*: Along with these conceptions of God in masculine terminology, we also find in the Vedas God conceived in feminine terms. The conception of Aditi, the Mother of gods, as the all-pervasive Infinite is significant. Says Max Mueller in his English translation of the *Rig Veda*: 'Aditi, an ancient god or goddess, is in reality the earliest name invented to express the Infinite; not the infinite as the result of a long process of abstract reasoning, but the visible Infinite, visible by the naked eye, the endless expanse, beyond the earth, beyond the clouds, beyond the sky.' The root meaning of Aditi is 'boundless', 'unbroken', 'indivisible' or 'infinite'. The *Rig Veda* describes Aditi in these terms: 'Aditi is the celestial sphere; Aditi is the intermediary space; Aditi is the mother, the father, the son; Aditi is all gods, the five classes of beings, the created, and is again the cause of creation.' (1.89.10)

Similarly Goddess Vāk (Word or Logos

personified) is conceived as the all-pervading divine Power which empowers and animates all gods and beings. She is the *saguṇa* aspect of Brahman (Īshvara). In the *Rig Veda* Vāk declares:

I move about in the form of Rudras, Vasus, Ādityas, and all gods ... I am the Queen of the whole universe, the bestower of all wealth. I am the knower of the Truth, the first among the worshipful. The gods have placed me in various regions, as diverse are my abodes, and I exist in various living beings. All things eat, breathe, see and hear only through me. ... I teach gods and men the highest Truth [compare *Kena Upanishad*, 4.1]. I make them great ... I have entered the heaven and earth and all beings and exist in numerous ways ... Having created all the worlds and beings, I move freely like the wind. I thus exist in my glory above the skies and on the earth. (10.125)

In the foregoing conceptions of God, and also that of Nārāyaṇa (the supreme Being residing in all beings as the Self),²² which is similar to that of Purusha, there is an echo of God as infinite and impersonal and as the indwelling Self of all beings, a view that later developed in the Upanishads as the impersonal spiritual Infinite, Brahman.

Side by side with these evolutionary cosmic conceptions, we find two other streams of thought all of which later culminated in a confluence, a grand synthesis. This synthesis is reflected even in the *Rig Veda* in the famous dictum: '*Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*, Truth/Existence is One; the sages describe It in various ways.' (1.164.46)

Concept of God and Gods as Rulers of the Universe

While thus the middle stream of Vedic thought seeks a Personal-Impersonal God in relation to the universe on a logical basis, giving Him impersonal functional names, a side stream running parallel to it seeks psychological satisfaction in conceiving various personal gods, phenomenal aspects of divine Power, who intervene in human affairs, look after

their welfare, satisfy their emotions, and control the forces of nature. These are gods like Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, Vāyu and Sūrya. Even in this conception their personality is vague. Often they are the embodiments of the forces of nature, or their controllers or presiding deities. Natural objects like fire, wind, sky and earth form their bodies and they, their inner soul. They are the guardians of the universe (Lokapālas), performing different functions. These gods may be likened to government functionaries in the governance of the universe. Though the repository of all power, the government remains personal-impersonal and operates through personal functionaries like the king and ministers to whom the powers are delegated. They act on behalf of the government in a personal manner, controlling different departments.

The supreme God stands for the king, who is the sovereign as well as the highest functionary. He is the supreme Ruler of the universe; and He delegates His power to other gods. In His personal aspect God rules from outside, as it were; but in His impersonal aspect He controls things from within as the inner Ruler (Antaryāmin), pervading everything as the great cosmic Law (*ritam brīhat*). According to the *Kaṭha Upanishad*, 'He is in man, in the gods, in the space, in the sky; He is in whatever is born in water, born on earth, born in space, and born in heavens. He is the great cosmic Law.'²³ His great cosmic Power (*prāṇa*) vibrating, the whole universe, along with everything in it, is projected forth (*yadidam kincha jagat sarvaṃ prāṇa ejati niḥsritam* —2.6.2). He is the inner law of being of things, of all that exist, and none can transgress it. He is the great Fear (*mahad bhayam*) as the cosmic Law, which everything obeys implicitly. He is like a raised thunderbolt (*vajram udyatam*) for fear of whom all the forces of nature, all the other gods, perform their respective functions. 'For fear of Him the fire burns, the sun shines, the rain pours, the wind blows, and death stalks everywhere.' (2.6.3)

By the force of the immutable Law (*prashāsana*) of this abiding supreme Reality the sun, the moon and the earth (and all other things in the universe) are held in their proper places and perform their functions duly.²⁴ He is the unseen immortal Ruler abiding within all these beings as their Self and controls them (*yaḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni antaro yamayati esha te ātmā antaryāmi amritaḥ* —3.7.15).

God and Gods as the Self

Thus by a gradual penetration of exterior gross manifestations, God is conceived as the very Self of all beings, which makes things what they are. The *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* declares, 'He who worships God or gods as apart from the Self does not know the truth; he is like a beast to the gods to be enjoyed.' (1.4.10)

Interactions with other streams of thought lead to the gods being seen as aspects or manifestations of the same supreme Reality. They are raised to the status of the supreme God by turns and in hymns sung to them the other gods are described as subordinate to Him. Yāska explains the origin and nature of these gods:

Mahābhāgyād-devatāyā eka ātmā bahudhā stūyate; ekasya ātmano anye devāḥ pratyangāni bhavanti; itaretara janmāno bhavanti; itaretara prakṛitayah; karmajanmānaḥ, ātmajanmānaḥ. ... Ātmā sarvaṃ devasya. It is because of the great glory and infinite facets of the Divine that the one Self (Atman) is extolled in many ways. The other gods (*devas*) come to be sub-members of the one Self. They are mutually born from one another; they are of one another's nature; they originate according to their function (karma); they are born of the Self. ... The whole essence of any god is the Self (Atman) only.²⁵

In different contexts the same God appears differently or is viewed differently as Indra, Mitra, Agni, Vāyu, or Varuṇa.²⁶ The one Essence (*asuratvam*) runs through all these gods (*mahad devānām asuratvam ekam*).²⁷

The Philosophical Quest for God as Reality or Truth

On the other side of the middle stream, runs parallel to it the rational philosophic enquiry about the nature of the impersonal Reality or Truth (*sat*), which is the source of all—God, gods, the universe and its living beings.

In the very early stages of the *Rig Veda* (10.129) itself, the rishi questions in the 'Nāsadiya Sūkta' about the nature of the Reality before creation:²⁸

Then there was neither Aught nor Nought,
no air or sky beyond.
What covered all? Where rested all?
In watery gulf profound? (1)
Nor death was there, nor deathlessness,
nor change of night and day.
That One breathed calmly,* self-sustained,
nought else beyond it lay. (2)

[* it was neither nothingness, nor insentient material entity.]

Who can predicate anything about
the pre-creation nature of
Reality? It remains indescribable
in Its own nature:
Who knows, who ever told, from
whence this vast creation rose?
No gods had then been born—
who then can ever the truth disclose? (6)
Whence sprang this world and whether
framed by hand divine or no—
Its Lord in heaven alone can tell,
if even He can show.* (7)

[*even the Lord is post-creation in conception.]

All our views are post-creation, even of God, for who saw the First One being born?²⁹ But still from the phenomenal point of view some relationship between Reality and manifestation has to be conceived, without which the mind, being itself an emanation from Reality, feels lost and restless as Reality impinges on it all the time. Hence the poser:

The kindling ray that shot across
the dark and drear abyss—
Was it beneath? Or high aloft?
What bard can answer this?

The answer follows:

Gloom hid in gloom existed first—
One sea, eluding view;
That One, a Void in Chaos wrapt
by inward fervour grew. (3)

Within it first arose desire,
the primal germ of mind;
Which nothing with Existence
links as sages searching find. (4)

One kindling ray from that One (*tad ekam*) gives rise to mighty creative cosmic forces:³⁰

There fecunding powers were found,
and mighty forces strove—
A self-supporting mass beneath,
and energy above. (5)

(to be continued)

Notes and References

1. 'Man' denotes a human being.
2. *Tatra ko mohaḥ, kaḥ shokaḥ, ekatvam anupashyati.* —*Īśha Upanishad*, 7. [Keeping in view the general reader's convenience, the international system of spelling and diacritical marks for Sanskrit are not fully used here. The usual spelling is adopted. However, long vowels are indicated by a stroke above (ā, ī, ū) and hard consonants by a dot below (ṭ, ḍ, ṇ). And the visarga by 'ḥ'.]
3. *Dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe, mūrtam chaiva amūrtam cha.* —*Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 2.3.1.
4. *Devātma-shaktiḥ.* —*Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, 1.3.
5. *Māyām tu prakṛitīm vidyāt māyīnam tu maheshvaram; Tasya-avyaya bhūtāiḥ tu vyāptam sarvamideam jagat.* (Know maya to be the *prakṛiti* and the Supreme *Īshvara* the Lord of maya. He permeates the entire universe and its beings through His maya, like parts of His body.) —*Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*. 4.10. It is to be noted that though *Īshvara* is personal He is infinite and universal, and not a particular individual.
6. *Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, 1.1.8, 2.1.2-3; *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.
7. Compare *Bhagavadgītā*, 9.10.

8. *Rig Veda*, 10.190.1.
9. *Satyena panthā vitato devayānaḥ*. —*Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, 3.1.6.
10. *Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, 3.1.5-6.
11. In Vedic thought there is no conception of 'creation' out of nothing. It is *srishṭi* (projection) of subtle components into gross manifestation, like the seed into a tree. In the very early Vedic stage, it was like construction out of pre-existing materials. Later on the subtle *prakṛiti*/maya Power became the material cause of the universe. Hence God is known as the *srishṭi-kartā*, Projector of the universe, and not 'creator'. The words 'Creator' and 'creation' are used in this sense in this article.
12. *Prapanchopashamam śhāntam śhivam advaitam*. —*Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, 7.
13. *Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yat prayanti-abhisamvishanti*. —*Taittirīya Upanishad*, 3.1.1.
14. *Brahmaiva idam vishvam idam varishṭham*. —*Muṇḍaka Upanishad*, 2.2.11.
15. *Tajjalān iti śhānta upāsita*. —*Chāndogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1.
16. 'Vishvakarma Sūkta', *Rig Veda*, 10.82.3.
17. *Rig Veda*, 10.81.2-4.
18. 'Hiranyagarbha Sūkta', *Rig Veda*, 10.121.1-3.
19. *Hiranyagarbham janayāmāsa pūrvam*. —*Shvetāshvatarā Upanishad*, 3.4.
20. Compare *Gitā*, 14.3; *Bhāgavata*, 11.6.16.
21. *Rig Veda*, 10.90.
22. *Ātmā nārāyaṇaḥ paraḥ*. —*Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad*, 13.4.
23. *Nrishad varasad ritasad vyomasad abjā gojā ritajā adriajā ritam brihat*. —*Kaṭha Upanishad*, 2.2.2.
24. *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.9.
25. *Nirukta*, 7.4.
26. *Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.
27. *ibid.*, 3.55.1.
28. 'Song of Creation', *Original Sanskrit Texts*, trans. J Muir, 5. 356.
29. *Ko dadarsha prathamam jāyamānam*. —*Rig Veda*, 1.164.4.
30. During worship in Devī temples the Devī as maya Power is extolled as the Shakti or spouse (Vallabhā) of Īshvara, who by Her very glance projects forth millions of universes (Īkṣhaṇa-srisṭi brahmāṇḍa-koṭi ishvara-vallabhā). This concept of projection of millions of universes by the maya Power comes up now and then in Vedantic texts and the Purāṇas.

The idea that the goal is far off, far beyond nature, attracting us all towards it, has to be brought nearer and nearer, without degrading or degenerating it. The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within this temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul and man—and there it reaches the last words it can teach. ... Nature never has power over you. Like a frightened child you were dreaming that it was throttling you, and the release from this fear is the goal: not only to see it intellectually, but to perceive it, actualise it, much more definitely than we perceive this world. Then we shall know that we are free. Then, and then alone, will all difficulties vanish, then will all the perplexities of heart be smoothed away, all crookedness made straight, then will vanish the delusion of manifoldness and nature; and Maya, instead of being a horrible, hopeless dream, as it is now, will become beautiful, and this earth, instead of being a prison-house, will become our playground; and even dangers and difficulties, even all sufferings, will become deified and show us their real nature, will show us that behind everything, as the substance of everything, He is standing, and that He is the one real Self.

—Swami Vivekananda, *CW*, 2.128-9

Sri Ramakrishna's Kali: A Philosophical Study

DR DEBABRATA DAS

Sri Ramakrishna taught that all religions are valid paths to God. He not only practised spiritual disciplines prescribed in different paths of Hinduism, but also followed the paths of Christianity and Islam and learnt from first-hand experience that all religions lead to the same spiritual Truth.

Kali Symbology

He practised Advaita sadhana—which identifies God with the impersonal Absolute—also, but his heart was on Kali, the consort of Shiva and Mother of the universe. He lived, moved and had his being in Her. Kali is both the goddess of destruction and saviour of mankind. The Dakshineswar Kali image, whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped, is symbolic of both these aspects. The goddess stands on a white, prostrate, marble image of Shiva. She wears a garland of human heads and a girdle of human arms. Blood drips down Her lolling tongue. In Her two left hands She holds a man's severed head and a sword. With Her two right hands She offers boons and reassurance to devotees.

Bondage and Liberation are Kali's Play

Sri Ramakrishna taught that Kali is responsible for all the evil in the world, which She visits upon us so that we might pray to Her for salvation. But Her role as tormentor-saviour is what is important to spiritual aspirants. According to Sri Ramakrishna, Kali's *modus operandi* is to entrap mankind through *maya*, the great illusion, and then grant salvation through grace:

Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her *māyā* worldly people become entangled in 'woman and gold', and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation.¹

The Divine Mother is full of bliss. Creation, preservation, and destruction are the waves of Her sportive pleasure. Innumerable are the living beings. Only one or two among them obtain liberation. And that makes Her happy (818).

The nature of God is like that of a child. As a child builds up his toy house and then breaks it down, so God acts while creating, preserving and destroying the universe. (176)

Sri Ramakrishna taught that God's actions are a form of recreation or 'play'. He once described a vision he had of Kali in which 'She appeared with a child in the womb, which She brought forth and swallowed up the next instant. And as much of it as went into Her mouth became void! She showed me that all is Void. And She said as it were, "Come confusion! Come confusion!"'² To attain salvation, we must first get the attention of this 'playful' Mother.³ We must cling to Her and propitiate Her with steadfast devotion till She reveals Herself to us. And according to Sri Ramakrishna the key to propitiation is love. One must open one's heart to the Divine Mother. 'To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her: "Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee."' (138)

'God Alone Has Become Everything'

Sri Ramakrishna loved Kali with his pure heart full of yearning. His devotion to Her bears the unmistakable stamp of the love of a sweetheart. For years Sri Ramakrishna prayed continually to Her to reveal Herself to him. When after a long series of austerities he could not see Her, he decided to end his life. It was then that She appeared before him for the first time. From then on his life was one of a pro-

longed religious ecstasy, which he experienced again and again whenever he felt Her presence. Soon Sri Ramakrishna began to see Kali in everything: the ant, the cat, the marble floor, the door sill, even the sexual organ. He saw Her in trees, plants, animals, men and grass; in the innocent child as well as the honest man; in the cheat, the swindler, the villain, the prostitute. These experiences explain Sri Ramakrishna's repeated saying: 'It is God alone who has become everything.' (345, 393, 818)

Swami Vivekananda on Kali

Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda), Sri Ramakrishna's prime disciple, did not accept Kali easily. How the Master groomed him into doing that is another story. Swamiji said, 'This Kali is Brahman in manifestation. Haven't you heard Sri Ramakrishna's illustration of the "snake moving and the snake at rest" (representing the dynamic and static aspects of the same thing)?'⁴

How I used to hate Kali! Swamiji said, referring to his own days of doubts in accepting the Kali ideal, 'And all Her ways! That was the ground of my six years' fight—that I would not accept Her. But I had to accept Her at last! Ramakrishna Paramahansa dedicated me to Her, and now I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and does with me what She will. ... Yet I fought so long! I loved him, you see, and that was what held me. I saw his marvellous purity. ... I felt his wonderful love. ... His greatness had not dawned on me then. All that came afterwards when I had given in. At that time I thought him a brain-sick baby, always seeing visions and the rest. I hated it. And then I, too, had to accept Her!

'... She made a slave of me. ... And Ramakrishna Paramahansa made me over to Her. ...

'The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali? Yes, I think there's no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends.

'You see, I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali and Mother. ... And I believe in Brahman too. ... But is it not always like that?

Is it not the multitude of cells in the body that make up the personality, the many brain-centres, not the one, that produce consciousness? ... Unity in complexity! Just so! And why should it be different with Brahman? It is Brahman. It is the One. And yet—and yet—it is the gods too!' (8.263-4)

Swamiji's description of Mother Kali becomes more vivid in his poem 'Kali the Mother':

Dancing mad with joy,
Come, Mother, come!
For Terror is Thy name,
Death is in Thy breath,
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e'er.
Thou 'Time', the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!
Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction's dance,
To him the Mother comes. (4.384)

God and the Absolute Reality are One

Sri Ramakrishna taught that Brahman and Shakti (Kali) are the same Reality, called Brahman when static and Kali when in a state of creative activity. This implies that God (Ishvara) and the Absolute are different aspects of the same identical Reality. When called God, the same Absolute creates worlds without number, sustains them and finally destroys them. 'When the Godhead is thought of as creating, preserving, and destroying, It is known as the Personal God, *saguna* Brahman, or the Primal Energy, *Adyashakti*,' says Sri Ramakrishna. 'Again, when It is thought of as beyond the three *gunas*, then It is called the attributeless Reality, *nirguna* Brahman, beyond speech and thought; this is the Supreme Brahman, Parabrahman.'⁵ Such a God is not only the proper, but also the highest object of man's worship.

Thus God and the Absolute are the same ocean of pure *sat-chit-ananda*. God is really the dynamic aspect and creative form of the Absolute, which in Its eternal, immutable aspect

has no creativity or activity at all, and is therefore both formless (*rupa-hina*) and nameless (*nama-hina*); It can only be experienced, but not expressed in words (*avang-manasa-gocharam*).

'All This Is Brahman'

Brahman, non-different from Shakti, is the only ultimate Reality, according to Sri Ramakrishna. He also held that Brahman is present in everything and every being of the universe. Like the Upanishadic seers of ancient India, he said that 'all this is Brahman'. By the Upanishadic text '*sarvam khalvidam brahma*, all this is Brahman' he did not mean that there is no 'all' but only 'Brahman'. For him, rather 'all' exists as much as Brahman. The 'all' is only Brahman in different forms. According to him Brahman as Shakti has become the individual souls, the world and the twenty-four principles from Prakriti down to the physical elements (of the Sankhya philosophy).

In Sri Ramakrishna's language the earth, the heavens, the sun, the moon, the temple, the garden, the jar, the pot, the bed, man and woman, the young and the old, birds and beasts—all are verily so many forms and manifestations of the Divine Mother or Kali, all are Brahman. Such was his unique realization.

The Absolute Is All-inclusive

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that just as we have to put together a *bel* fruit's kernel, stones and skin to get its total weight (328), to know Brahman or the Absolute fully and comprehensively, we must admit all its revelations from the different levels of consciousness, such as waking, dreaming, deep sleep and samadhi or concentration with its two stages, *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa*. So he says, 'I accept all—Brahman and also maya, the universe, and its living beings. If I accepted less I should not get the full weight' (652). Philosophically speaking, this means that the Absolute as the all-inclusive whole or system must

include all possible objects of thought and experience. If the Absolute excludes something from Itself, it will be limited by what is thus excluded and cease to be Absolute. So we have to admit that the Absolute includes everything real, false and the apparently real, called maya. For Sri Ramakrishna, maya did not mean Brahman's magical power of conjuring up the illusory world-show with all its wonderful objects; as a metaphysical principle maya is the same as Shakti or Mahamaya who is non-different from Brahman and whom he worshipped as the Divine Mother (634-5). The Divine Mother as divine maya is in Brahman and inseparable from It, even as burning power inheres in fire, whiteness in milk, wetness in water and wriggling motion in a snake. (108, 290)

In certain other contexts he used the word maya to denote man's ignorance and egoism, his false sense of 'I' and 'my', as when one says, 'I am so learned, so rich, so powerful, I can do whatever I like', or when one says, 'My land, my property, my money, my children', and so on. 'On account of the barrier of ego,' he said, 'one does not see God.' (630)

Nitya and Lila

Thus, the central theme of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings is that Brahman as the Divine Mother or Kali has become all this. He admits all—Brahman, maya, *lila* and *jagat*. The philosophical implication of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching is this: Brahman in its essential nature (*svarupa*) is indeterminate and impersonal (*nirguna* and *nirvishesha*), while in its sportive creative activity (*lila*) it is Personal God (*saguna* and *savishesha*) or the Divine Mother. It is the Divine Mother that has become all this. When he says that he admits all—Brahman, maya, *lila* and *jagat*—what he really means is that he admits both *nitya* and *lila*. (447, 779)

We have to admit that while *nitya* represents Brahman in its eternal, essential and immutable being, *lila* represents it in its temporal creative activity, which may have a beginning

and an end in time. Sri Ramakrishna mentioned with approval the Tantras as saying that when there was no creation—no sun, moon, earth or heaven—it was all darkness and the Divine Mother as formless Mahakali was one with Mahakala, the Eternal Being. So there is a beginning of creation. In *mahapralaya*, or the great cosmic dissolution, there is a total annihilation of the world, and the Divine Mother Kali collects the seeds of creation and lays them up like an old housewife preserving used-up things in her earthen pot (135). Hence there is an end of creation, or a cessation of Brahman's creative activity. When this happens there is neither the world nor the Personal God as Creator of the world. What remains is the indeterminate *nirguna* Brahman. If we admit that, Brahman as indeterminate is the highest Reality and the Personal God is the form of Brahman's *lila* or creative activity, which is real but not eternal. It is only on this interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings that we can satisfactorily explain his last statement to Swami Vivekananda (then Naren): 'He who is Rama and He who is Krishna is now Sri Ramakrishna, but not from the point of view of your Vedanta.' For from the stand-

point of Advaita Vedanta, Brahman (*nirguna*) is the only Reality, Personal God and His incarnations being false and unreal.

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'He who is called Brahman by the jñānis is known as Atman by the yogis and as Bhagavan by the bhaktas' (133). When Sri Ramakrishna said that Brahman, Atman and Bhagavan are only different names of the same Reality, we hear the echo of the *Rig Vedic* text: '*Ekam sat, vipra bahudha vadanti: agnim yamam matarishvanam ahuh*. The one Reality is called by the wise ones in different ways: Agni, Yama, Matarishvan.'⁶ *

References

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), 136.
2. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975), 318.
3. See *Gospel*, 136.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.229-30.
5. *Gospel*, 218.
6. *Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.

Not Duration but Devotion

My child, will you spend the whole twenty-four hours of the day doing worldly things? Will you think about money day and night? Won't you repeat the name of the Lord a little? Do a little spiritual practice regularly every day, for ten minutes, for five minutes, or even only for two or three minutes. Practice must be regular and systematic; but whatever you do, do it with sincerity, from the heart. That will do you good. ... What is necessary, my child, is earnestness. The Mother dwells in every heart and She does not take into consideration how much time you put into your practice, but only how sincerely you do it. She only takes into account how much love and devotion you have for Her. In whatever condition you find yourself, pray very sincerely: 'Mother, be gracious to me. Have mercy on me. Give me devotion and faith at Thy lotus feet.' The Master used to say that the Lord responds quickly to the prayers of householders. ... He knows very well what a heavy load has been placed on their shoulders and He is quick to feel compassion for those who are in the world.

—Swami Shivananda

Jābāla Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Section Two

Inquiry into the true nature of the *avimukta*

अविमुक्तस्वरूपजिज्ञासा

अथ हैनमत्रिः पप्रच्छ याज्ञवल्क्यम् । य एषोऽनन्तोऽव्यक्त आत्मा तं कथमहं विजानीयामिति । स होवाच याज्ञवल्क्यः । सोऽविमुक्त उपास्यो स एषोऽनन्तोऽव्यक्त आत्मा सोऽविमुक्ते प्रतिष्ठित इति ॥१॥

1. Thereafter, the sage Atri [son of the creator god Brahman], asked Yājñavalkya: 'How am I to realize the Self (Atman), which is Infinite and Unmanifest?' Yājñavalkya replied: 'That *avimukta* is to be worshipped.¹ This Self (Atman), which is Infinite and Unmanifest, is established in *avimukta*.²

Spiritual practices for realizing the *avimukta*

अविमुक्तोपलब्धिसाधनम्

सोऽविमुक्तः कस्मिन्नतिष्ठित इति । वरणायां नास्यां च मध्ये प्रतिष्ठित इति । का वै वरणा का च नासीति । सर्वानिन्द्रियकृतान्दोषान्वारयतीति तेन वरणा भवति । सर्वानिन्द्रियकृतान् पापान् नाशयतीति तेन नासी भवति । कतमच्चास्य स्थानं भवतीति । भ्रुवोर्घ्राणस्य च यः संधिः स एष द्यौर्लोकस्य परस्य च संधिर्भवतीति । एतद्वै संधिं संध्यां ब्रह्मविद उपासत इति । सोऽविमुक्त उपास्य इति । सोऽविमुक्तं ज्ञानमाचष्टे यो वै तदेवं वेदेति ॥२॥

2. 'In which is the *avimukta* established?' 'He is established in between³ *varaṇā* and *nāsi*.' 'What is [meant by] *varaṇā* and what [by] *nāsi*?' '*Varaṇā* is so called because it wards off all the defects or faults committed through the senses.⁴ *Nāsi* is so named as it destroys all the sins committed by the senses.' 'And which is the seat of this *avimukta*?' 'That which is the junction of the eyebrows and the nose is also the junction of the luminous sphere (heaven) and this earthly world.⁵ The knowers of Brahman⁶ indeed worship this juncture (*sandhi*) as *sandhyā* (in their daily worship).⁷ That *avimukta* is to be worshipped. He who knows It thus,⁸ he indeed teaches (communicates) the wisdom of the *avimukta*.⁹

Section Three

Means to the *avimukta jñāna* (Knowledge of the *avimukta*)

अविमुक्तज्ञानोपायः

अथ हैनं ब्रह्मचारिण ऊचुः । किंज्येनामृतत्वं ब्रूहीति । स होवाच याज्ञवल्क्यः । शतरुद्रीयेणेति । एतान्येव ह वा अमृतस्य नामधेयानि । एतैर्ह वा अमृतो भवतीति ॥३॥

1. Well, then, the *brahmacārins*¹⁰ asked him (Yājñavalkya): 'Tell us, [what is the *mantra*] by repeating which one attains immortality.' Yājñavalkya replied: 'By [reciting] *Śatarudriya*.¹¹

These *mantras* alone are indeed the names of the Immortal [*Rudra*].¹² By [reciting] these [*mantras*] one verily becomes immortal.¹³

(to be continued)

Notes

1. As non-different from the individual self.
2. It is established in the *avimukta*, which is the Lord with attributes (*sopādhika īśvara*), so that by its uncovering (removal of attributes or limiting adjuncts), the Unmanifest and Infinite Self is realized in It. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.
3. 'In between the *varaṇā* and the *nāṣī*' is the meeting point of the upper part of the nose and the mid-point of the space between the two eyebrows. This is being explained more elaborately later.
4. The senses are ten in number: the five organs of perception (*jñānendriyas*) and the five organs of action (*karmendriyas*).
5. The construction appears rather elliptical. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets *parasya* as *bhūlokasya*. He also comments that this junction is well known and compares the luminous sphere (*dyuloka*) to the crown of the head (*brahma-kapāla-sthānam*) and the earthly world (*bhuloka*) to the end of the chin (*cubuka-avāsāna-sthānam*). It is called junction (*sandhi*) because it joins the *avimukta* in it. This junction is thus one's Self (Atman).
6. Brahman here could also mean the Veda.
7. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin comments thus: the knowers of Brahman worship this junction as their Self. That is, they meditate on the *gyotirlinga*.
8. That is, the true nature of *avimukta*.
9. Having realized the Self in its unqualified aspect (*nirviśeṣa ātman*), he imparts to his own group of disciples and followers his wisdom and the means for the direct perception of that Supreme Self. He thus teaches them the *tāraka jñāna* (the saving Knowledge of the Self). The idea is that he himself becomes verily the unqualified Brahman. —Upaniṣad Brahmayogin's commentary.
10. A *brahmacārī* is a student or disciple of a spiritual preceptor (*guru*). He lives a celibate life of strict moral and spiritual discipline in the *guru's* home (*guru-grha*) and devotes himself to the study of the Vedas and other scriptures under the *guru's* loving care and guidance.
11. The *mantras* embodied in the *Rudra Namakam*, starting with 'Namaste rudra manyava'.
12. These are the names of Rudra, who is of the very nature of Immortality (*amṛtasvarūpa*).
13. By the repetition of these *Śatarudriya mantras* a meditative person (*muni*) attains purity of mind and divine Knowledge, through which he becomes immortal.

God's Grace

I am happy to learn that you are practising spiritual disciplines. ... One finds abiding peace if only one can put one's whole mind on God. It is very difficult to do so; but if one makes an attempt, the Lord draws that person to Himself. The Master used to say, 'If a man takes ten steps towards God, God comes a hundred steps towards him.' If this were not true, who could realize Him? Is it possible to attain Him through human efforts? ... Can anybody put a price tag on God that one can have Him for a certain number of *japa* or so many austerities? Only His grace is required to realize Him.'

—Swami Turiyananda

❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

True Strength

Rasik Murari was a great devotee of Lord Shyamsundar. He was fond of meditating on and singing the glories of Krishna and Radha. Devotion to God was the only treasure Rasik cherished and constant remembrance of his Chosen Deity was his life's sole support. Simple and unassuming by nature, Rasik was deeply devoted to his guru Shyamanand and spent much time in serving devotees.

Once a local chieftain illegally confiscated a plot of land which Shyamanand owned. In despair, Shyamanand sent an urgent message to Rasik for help: 'Come at once; never mind what state you are in.' When the messenger arrived, Rasik was having his lunch. But such was his obedience to the guru that he left the meal half eaten and without even washing his hands started for his guru's place, miles away. Shyamanand was surprised to find that Rasik had obeyed him literally. Nevertheless, he praised his disciple's absolute faithfulness.

On hearing Shyamanand's story, Rasik decided to do whatever he could to persuade the chieftain to return his guru's land. In spite of being warned about the chieftain's ruthlessness, he proceeded to meet him. Anticipating something like this, the chieftain instructed his servants to let loose a rogue elephant on Rasik's path. But he gave his courtiers a different impression, saying: 'We have heard many stories about Rasik's spirituality. Let us see how much of all that is true. If Rasik really possesses spiritual powers he will face the elephant fearlessly; if not, he will not risk his life. Anyway, my elephant will not harm him. I only want to test him. That is my sole purpose.' In fact, the chieftain's real intention was to eliminate any obstacle in the way of his

usurping Shyamanand's land—even if it meant killing somebody.

Meanwhile, Rasik was approaching the chieftain's palace in his palanquin, oblivious of the impending danger. Suddenly his bearers saw the mad elephant advancing towards them. Shouting to Rasik to save himself, they hastily dropped the palanquin on the road and fled for their lives. Inside the palanquin, Rasik was immersed in thoughts of Lord Shyamsundar. The commotion took him by surprise and he was unable to get himself out of the elephant's way. But Rasik was not afraid—he was a realized soul who saw his Chosen Deity everywhere and in everything.

When the elephant was almost upon him, Rasik stretched out his hand and placed his palm on its trunk. One look at the elephant told him that it had been an extremely sinful person in its past life. Overcome with compassion and desiring to release the soul residing in the elephant's body from its terrible bondage, he addressed it with a gentle smile: 'Brother, you are not the cruel elephant you think you are. You are the immortal and ever-conscious Spirit! The essence of God pervades every cell of your body. Only you don't know it because the effect of your bad karma has clouded your vision. Give up this notion that you are an elephant! Sing the glories of the Lord and all your sins will be washed away. Meditate on Him and He will carry you across samsara.'

Rasik's inspiring words had a wonderful effect on the beast. Its inner vision opened and its heart was flooded with devotion. It knelt down in complete submission, shedding tears of joy. Uttering the Lord's name over the elephant, Rasik continued: 'The divine Name is a boundless ocean of bliss. One drop of it can

wipe out the accumulated sins of countless births. Do you bathe in that ocean and become blessed!’ He accepted the elephant as a disciple and named it Gopaldas.

The evil chieftain could not believe his eyes! Overpowered by penitence, he came

running out of his palace and fell at Rasik’s feet, begging forgiveness. Needless to say, Shyamanand’s land was returned. Holiness triumphed over deceit. Rasik Murari’s devotion to his guru became legend. *

A Temple in the Heart!

Pūsālār was a devotee of Lord Shiva from Tiruninravur (Tamil Nadu). Born in a brahmin family, he was well versed in the Vedas. But more important, his mind was soaked in Shiva, and he was convinced that dedicated service to the Lord was his way of life. He deeply desired to build a temple for Shiva, but being poor could not raise the necessary funds. Crestfallen, he decided to build a temple for the Lord in his heart. He went about collecting construction materials. On an auspicious day he performed the groundbreaking ceremony and laid the foundation for the temple. He summoned carpenters, masons and sculptors and explained to them their allotted work—all mentally.

His extraordinary love for the Lord made him work day and night. The temple gradually rose from its foundation—basement, different tiers, pillars, sculptures, images, temple tower and all. He also dug a well and a tank for the temple. The construction over, he consulted the Agamas and fixed an auspicious date for the consecration, the day when the Lord formally enters the temple.

Meanwhile, the Pallava king in Kanchipuram, a great devotee of Shiva, built a magnificent temple for the Lord and fixed an auspicious date for its consecration. The date coincided with that fixed by Pūsālār. The Lord decided to proclaim Pūsālār’s devotion to the world. A day before the consecration He appeared to the king in a dream and told him that He had a devotee by name Pūsāl in Tiruninravur, who had built a temple after many a long day of deep thought and labour. The Lord had to enter that temple the next day. He

asked the king to fix a different day for the consecration of his temple.

When the dream broke, the king decided to personally offer respects to this noble devotee whom the Lord Himself had extolled. With eager and joyful expectation he left for Tiruninravur along with his retinue. When he enquired the local people of Pūsālār’s temple, they pleaded ignorant. He convened an assembly of brahmins and, after due honour to them, asked them if they knew of a pure soul by name Pūsālār. They replied in the affirmative and offered to fetch him before the king. The king declined and instead decided to himself meet the devotee.

Offering salutations to Pūsālār he said, ‘Lord Shiva Himself told me that today is the consecration day of the temple you have built for Him. I have come here to offer my respects to you.’ Pūsālār was overwhelmed to know that the Lord Himself graciously considered him also a devotee. He told the king, ‘O noble one, I wanted to build a temple for the Lord, but my efforts didn’t bear fruit. That’s why I built a temple for the Lord mentally.’ And then Pūsālār narrated how we went about the temple erection. The king was amazed at the depth of his devotion. He fell prostrate before Pūsālār, sang praises of his devotion and took leave of him.

For many years Pūsālār devotedly worshipped the Lord in his temple and conducted many celebrations before he left this mortal world and reached his beloved Lord’s eternal abode. He is known as Pūsālār Nāyanār, one of the sixty-four Nāyanmārs (Shaiva saints of Tamil Nadu). *

Inter-religious Harmony in a Multi-religious Society

MAJOR H SUBRAMANIAN

Lead me from ignorance to enlightenment' has been one of the pristine prayers of our ancient land. The truth of the ancient Tamil sayings, 'Ignorance is the natural and inherent characteristic of all beings' and 'To strive for enlightenment is the noblest of pursuits', is as relevant today as it was then. Even after two millennia, in the present era of knowledge explosion and information proliferation, there is no dearth of ignorance and misconception.

Recently, at a gathering of the elite and enlightened members of a community, reference was made to inter-religious harmony. The immediate response it elicited was that it was not relevant, as there were no communal disturbances in the city at that time. As the member tried to explain the concept of inter-religious harmony and its relevance in a religiously pluralistic society, it became evident to him that the members had imagined it to be a group of specially trained personnel who were sent to places of communal unrest to restore peace and harmony, something comparable to the fire brigade or the Rapid Action Force. If this is the level of understanding in highly educated and knowledgeable circles, one can well imagine the situation with others. There can thus be no overemphasis on the need for education and inculcation of the concept as well as its imperative in a religiously pluralistic society like ours.

Coexistence of Different Religions in India

India has the unique distinction of having the most religiously pluralistic population. In no other nation in the world can one find such a random distribution of people of

varied religious faiths—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Christians, Muslims, and followers of some tribal religions as well. Generally, in most of the countries the religion of the majority enjoys the position of privilege. In theocratic states it is overt, but even in so-called secular states there is a covert patronage for the religion of the majority. But surprisingly in India the Hindus, who form the majority, appear to have developed a minority complex. While this could be attributed to some extent to the misdeeds of the Semitic faiths that invaded the country in the past, undue pampering of those faiths by successors to power has also contributed much to this complex. Due to the aggressive proselytizing by these religions in the past, followers of other religions, Hindus in particular, are now chary of even friendly initiatives from them.

Intermingling of Communities Inevitable in the Modern Age

Religious pluralism is certainly not a new phenomenon in our country. In the past, several religions did coexist without creating much social unrest. But it should be realized that in those days religious communities lived in comparative isolation and maintained their respective religious and cultural identities. They did not experience the type of intermingling of communities brought about by technological revolution, rapid urbanization and globalization. Today it is not uncommon to find in a single multi-storeyed building people of different faiths living as neighbours. Also, at the workplace, during travel, and on several other occasions one has to be in the company of persons of other religious faiths

during the greater part of the day. All this is bound to produce interactions and encounters of some kind or other, knowingly or unknowingly.

Religion—Its Negative and Positive Roles

Religion has played an ambiguous role in the life and development of our country in the recent past. Outmoded beliefs and practices, and the concepts of fate and predetermination have run counter to progress and development. Religion has also inhibited the growth of a scientific temper. Furthermore, religion has often taken sides with the rich and the powerful and tried to perpetuate injustice and social inequalities. Still no nation can do away with religion altogether, as it is an essential necessity for humanity in general. Properly understood and practised, religion can play a major role in satisfying human needs on the emotional and intellectual planes. Whenever and wherever its ethical and moral aspects are emphasized, it has helped to unify citizens in a community of love and also given them the fervour to fight social injustice. Its spiritual side provides vision, values and resources for a purposeful living.

Fear and Ignorance the Main Problems

But in any religious community, the awareness of its religion varies greatly among its followers. Those having a clear conception of its basic philosophy and tenets, the ultimate goals and its unique deeper issues, form a negligible minority. Then there is a sizeable section who have some idea of their religion, an idea often incomplete and incorrect. They have strong notions about their religious faith and in most cases they are inflexible. Lastly, there is the vast majority who have little knowledge of their religion. Their religious affiliation is only notional, be they Hindus, Muslims or Christians. Such state of affairs prevails in all traditions.

The main problems to be tackled in bringing about inter-religious harmony are ig-

norance and fear: ignorance of one's own religion, its basic philosophy and its tenets, and the fear of having to acknowledge the truth of other faiths. Why? Because for most people religion has been synonymous with accepting an unquestionable authority. So where religious communities of different faiths live together, it is only a form of passive coexistence, an unavoidable contingency to put up with, and not one of active cooperation and mutual respect. The latter can develop only when and where there is no fear: fear of losing one's identity, fear of one's faith being shaken, fear of having to acknowledge the truth in other faiths.

Need for a Deeper Study of One's Religion

An in-depth knowledge of one's own religion will be of much help in enabling one to develop an attitude of mutual respect. But what is essential is a genuine concern for the welfare of the community in general. Also, a lack of knowledge of anything but one's own religion can be the cause of much misunderstanding and conflict. So, the wise, the intelligent and the well-educated of all communities should strive to view religion from a larger perspective. It would not be wrong to say 'He does not know religion, who only his religion knows.' For from the knowledge of the historical development of religions one can understand how the original vision has been distorted over a period of time and how enduring values could be recovered. A knowledge of the sociological function of religion will help in mobilizing it to strengthen the community and fight injustice and oppression. History is replete with instances where atheistic philosophies and ideologies have failed to provide society with the much-needed stability. The recent failure of Marxism in the communist countries has yet again proved that no atheistic philosophy can provide the theological validity and emotional security so indispensable to a balanced development of human person-

ality.

Need for Inter-religious Harmony

There is no denying the fact that communalism is a major problem in India, the world's largest democracy, having the largest religiously pluralistic population. An in-depth study of this problem will reveal that its roots are in the country's social set-up and that religion is used only as a cover or an instrument by the people to assert their social and cultural identity. It can also be seen how ignorance and distrust of other religions are exploited by the corrupt and the selfish of every community to further their own vested interests.

Second, one should clearly understand the difference between secularism as a philosophy and secularism as a state policy. Secularism as a philosophy visualizes a way of life lived without any reference to God or an ultimate Reality, and hence has no place in an Indian's life, which is founded on religion. As a state policy, secularism should aim at being impartial to all religions. Though not understandably allowing religion to influence it, the state policy should permit religion to make its contribution towards strengthening the moral fibre and the spiritual foundation of the country's citizens. But, unfortunately, what is happening in our country is quite the reverse. Exploiting the ignorance and mutual distrust between communities, politicians let religion influence state policy, granting concessions to one community or other to better their own positions. In addition to this, self-appointed custodians and champions of some minority communities take advantage of certain lacunae in our Constitution and misuse the privileges granted to them. A misunderstanding of secularism has resulted in not just neglect of religion but total indifference to it, especially to its moral aspects. It is only with the active participation of the enlightened public, hav-

ing an in-depth knowledge of different religious traditions, that a sense of values and social obligation can be inculcated in the masses.

Third, in India any move or initiative coming from one religious group, even if for a just cause aiding common good, is treated by others as a purely internal problem of that group. And if other communities, particularly the majority community, supports a move initiated by one of the minority communities, it is immediately labelled by the fundamentalists and vested interests of the minority group as the majority community's interference in their affairs. Also, whenever a sincere step is taken towards solving a problem of national significance, pseudo-secularists promptly brand it as religious fundamentalism and do their best to alienate the rest from the movement. So it is hardly surprising that in India several important social reforms essential for national progress are either never implemented, or, even if taken up for consideration, invariably get bogged down in the morass of minority rights, religious freedom or secularism.

Finally, the enlightened section of any community have a major obligation to fulfil in terms of educating and guiding their less fortunate brethren. If today people lacking moral character and competence are among those who hold positions of power and influence, it is primarily because of the failure of the intelligentsia to enter public life when opportunities were abundant. As a consequence, the whole nation is now facing a crisis created by rampant corruption and loss of ethics in public life. Only religions have the required strength and stamina to fight these evil forces and restore ethical values to society. To achieve this, religions will have to forge a united front to combat social evils. But this will be possible only if there is perfect harmony between the different religious communities. Hence the imperative for harmony in our multi-religious society. *

What good is it if we acknowledge in our prayers that God is the Father of us all, and in our daily lives do not treat every man as our brother?

—Swami Vivekananda, *CW*, 4.191



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Ṛg Vedic Sūktas: Asya Vāmiya Sūktam.

Trans. Swami Amritananda. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. 1999. xi + 159 pp. Rs 40.

This book is an English translation of the fifty-two mantras (*ṛks*) of the *Ṛg Veda* called 'Asya Vāmiya Sūkta'. The first of the four Vedas, the *Ṛg Veda* consists of songs of praise and contains 1017 (1028 according to some other recensions) hymns divided into ten books. It represents the first adventures of the human mind into the meaning of existence and man's place in the universe. The function of the hymns is twofold: material prosperity (*abhyudaya*) and the ultimate good or God-realization (*nirṣreyasa*). There are hymns exploring the meaning of the rituals, emphasizing their verbal aspects, like the origin and power of sacred speech, rather than their physical aspect. The profuse use of symbols and the sublime imagery projected by the mantras demand the guidance of a safe commentator. The several scholarly attempts at interpreting the hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* have resulted in revealing a lot of information. But the confusions and inconsistencies of the ordinary reader, the layman, regarding the implications of the imageries and symbols of the Vedic language changed little. The great Sāyaṇācārya's commentaries on the Vedas assume significance in this context. He has commented on, elucidated and critically treated challenging passages from the *sūktas*.

A famous *sūkta* of the *Ṛg Veda* and rich in symbolic language, the 'Asya Vāmiya Sūkta' elicits no concurrence from scholars regarding its meaning. With citations from the Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, Sāyaṇācārya substantiates his position in his commentary. Even so he has made references to ancient authors like Yāska to render a thoroughgoing interpretation of the hymn.

To people who cannot devote much time to a systematic study of the Vedas, a simple rendering of this famous *sūkta* into English would be an intellectual blessing. This is what Swami Amritanandaji

has done in translating the *sūkta*, based on the almost reliable commentary of Sāyaṇācārya. The work becomes all the more important in view of the methodology adopted for its English translation. The author gives the full text (*ṛk*) in Sanskrit, followed by the meaning of the mantra in simple English. This enables a comparative study of the original and its translation for further commentary. The various words used in the *sūkta* call for explanation and interpretation. This word-by-word analysis and explanation of meanings is the third step of the translation. This is followed by citations and references of verses and hymns from other authors, especially Sāyaṇācārya, and scriptural texts like the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Throughout the translation the author has extensively referred to the *Kaṭha*, *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads* and to *sūktas* like 'Nāsadiya Sūkta' and 'Puruṣa Sūkta'. This underlines the essential similarity of all the texts: *ekam sadviprā bahudhā vadanti* —the essential unity behind the various manifestations of the one Principle. This Advaitic statement is the hallmark of the 'Asya Vāmiya Sūkta'.

The book has a preface and an introduction. Though there is no glossary or bibliography, the work is self-explanatory and is a valuable contribution to Vedic literature.

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Quest For Knowledge: Gita for Beginners.

Swami Ramanujananda. Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Thrissur 680 551. 2000. viii + 112 pp. Rs 35.

Innumerable scholars, thinkers and devotees, both Eastern and Western, have attempted to dip into the *Bhagavadgītā*, an ocean of uplifting and elevating ideas. Here is another addition to the extensive literature on the *Gītā*, but with a new get-up and targeted at a specific group. Swami Ramanujanandaji has tried this novel approach to present the

Gītā in question-answer form for beginners who lack any background, but are inquisitive about the *Gītā* and its message.

The questions are framed chapter-wise and their answers given in a clear and simple language, providing a gist of the philosophical thread woven into the 700 verses of this unique scripture. A suitable introduction precedes each chapter and acquaints the reader with the place of the *Gītā* in Indian philosophical literature.

The author's attempt is quite successful as this small book provides comprehensive information about the message and essence of the *Gītā*. A Glossary, useful to both beginners and advanced students alike, enhances the value of the book. It is a welcome addition to *Gītā* literature.

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The Light Divine: Life and Philosophy of Ramakrishna. *Swami Harshananda*. Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. 2001. 105 pp. Rs 5.

In the preface of the book under review, the author questions the need of an additional biography of Sri Ramakrishna when there are many in existence. But one is compelled to answer in the positive after being through with this book. For this is a unique biography: very concise, but rich in details, providing a fascinating insight into the divinity in action that was Sri Ramakrishna, and enabling one to have a peep at this ocean of divine light.

Within 105 pages the book encompasses the life of Sri Ramakrishna right from his birth to mahasamadhi, brief life-sketches of his monastic and householder (including women) disciples, as well as Sri Ramakrishna's views on Brahman, maya, creation, the immanence of God, jnana and bhakti, good and evil, and the goal of life. All essential details are presented in a straight, direct style, bearing Swami Harshanandaji's unmistakable stamp. The language is simple and lucid. Both the novice and the long-time devotee will like this book.

An ideal gift to youngsters, the book help them grasp the true meaning of spirituality and make them inquisitive of Sri Ramakrishna and his Mission. The cover is attractive and meaningful.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

Kailash Manasarovar—A Pilgrimage (VCD). *Ed. Swami Kamalatmananda*. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. 2001. Rs 200 (reduced price).

Seeking respite from his usual mundane chores, which invariably bind him to the world, when man tries to go Godward, he is said to be on pilgrimage. It is a sacred act that takes him to the Reality behind the phenomena. If we agree with this definition of a pilgrimage, this VCD amply lives up to the definition. It takes us to a world of gods through a captivating audio-visual presentation of a pilgrimage to Kailash and Manasarovar.

More than merely being a good travelogue, it informs us about the mystical and mythical importance of these twin places. An excellent, well-narrated script doles out this information, copiously drawing from the Hindu and Buddhist mythical lore. Interestingly, a major chunk of Indian mythology has the Himalayas as its locus—a place aptly said to be symbolic of Indian religion and spirituality. A plethora of wonderful characters stand before us through these legends—legends that have been instrumental in moulding an entire race whose generations right from the hoary past have grown up listening to them. Mothers of this race have always lulled their kids to sleep murmuring these myths into their soft ears. This informative script culled from our rich mythology is in perfect consonance with the beautiful visuals and breathes life into the scenes. The catchy, sonorous background music further adds to its vivacity. Especially the tune of the *Lingashtakam* lingers in our mind even long after we have viewed the video. Of course, the camera could have been handled in a more professional way, but that does not lessen the capacity of the film to enkindle the divine in us in any way. In fact, here is a striking case of how technology helps stir the sublime in man.

A group of twenty devotees led by a few monks of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, had embarked on this pilgrimage in May 1998. That sojourn has ended up in the shape of this deserving piece of a VCD.

Leaving Chennai, the group pause at Varanasi, traverse through the picturesque, landlocked Nepal, and reach Kathmandu. After visiting a few Buddhist monasteries and the gorgeous palace of the Nepali monarch, they proceed further through the rugged Tibetan Himalayas. They cross several

snowy mountains and valleys, vast stretches of desolate plains with sparkling rivulets. Finally they get to the sandy banks of the glittering Manasarovar—a marvel—and then to the abode of Shiva, Kailash, a place of rare sanctity to every devout Hindu and Buddhist—about 21,000 feet above sea level. Words are poor vehicles of expression when it comes to feelings. How true! All that one does is remain mute in the presence of that splendour that is Kailash—grave, majestic, mysterious.

Providing many hints about the nature of this odyssey, this 'e-pilgrimage' could be a precursor to a real pilgrimage to Kailash. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, deserves our gratitude for bringing out this pilgrimage beautifully on a VCD at a special price of Rs 200.

Br Dhyanaachaitanya
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Hundred Facets of Vinoba. N Krishnaswamy. Sahitya Mandira, 18/B 7th Cross Road, Narasimharaja Colony, Bangalore 560 019. 2001. x + 150 pp. Rs 60.

Eleventh September need not always be associated with Osama bin Laden and international terrorism. Eleventh September also celebrates the birth of a man of peace, Vinoba Bhave. It was at his feet that the terrorists of the Chambal valley surrendered their arms and calmly walked into prisons in the early 1960s.

After Mahatma Gandhi passed away, Vinoba gave us the Gandhian light of simple living and noble thinking amidst the increasing gloom of political chicanery and moral turpitude. The light continues to illumine Indian spaces from the ashramas founded by him at Bodhgaya, Paunar, Pathankot, Indore, North Lakhimpur (Assam) and Bangalore. N Krishnaswamy has done well to gather a sheaf of biographical anecdotes for *Hundred Facets* to inspire the younger generation.

Krishnaswamy's titles are themselves eloquent,

crisp and tempting: 'Eat Less, Live Longer', '100,000 Grains of Rice', 'I Want the New Moon', 'Brahmins Carry Night Soil'. He has turned the focus on aspects which are important for the growing mind. Thus there are several pages about Vinoba's respect for his mother, his hard work, his compassion for the poor and the spiritual heights scaled by *brahmacharya*. Vinoba's parents taught their three children to avoid both wastage and surplus. These lessons stood them well in life as all the three became lifelong celibates and dedicated themselves completely to Gandhian idealism.

Vinoba's pet project, the Bhoodan Movement, is surveyed well. While he tried to bring comfort to the marginalized Dalits, he did not find the higher castes inimical and could be friendly with the Communists as well. His clarion call was 'Jai Jagat', a divine dream of human unity. All this was possible because of his deep faith in the all-pervading Supreme. Statistics regarding Vinoba's reading habits are very revealing. He knew many languages but avoided reading dramas and novels. As *Maitri* reported in 1977:

'Baba knows some 50,000 verses by heart. He learnt by rote the devotional songs, bhajans, in different languages like Tamil and Telugu. The *Jnaneshwari* has a total of 9000 *ovis* (verses); Baba knows 3000 of them by heart. Ramdas Swami's *Dasabodha* has 7000 *ovis*, of these he knows 2000 by heart. He studied the *Vinay Patrika* of Tulsidas, *Japuji* and *Sukhamani* of the Sikhs and the works of Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva from Assam.'

Such is the man-making religion we have in Sanatana Dharma. Gandhi praised Vinoba as a Bhima, a Hercules, a Gorakhnath who had surpassed his master Machindranath. *Hundred Facets* adds to this knowledge by portraying Vinoba as a leader who instilled the quality of leadership in his disciples. May this tribe increase!

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The Index Finger

Excuse me, sir,' said a timid student. 'I couldn't make out what you wrote on the margin of my test paper.'

'I told you to write more legibly,' said the teacher.

❧ Reports ❧

Conducted. A 3-day medical camp at Bali-Harachandi temple near Brahmagiri on the occasion of Raja Utsav Mela, by Ramakrishna Math, Puri, from 14 to 16 June. 447 patients were treated at the camp. On the sacred occasion of Ratha Yatra the centre conducted another medical camp from 12 to 20 July in which 1170 patients were treated. On this occasion sherbet was served to nearly 6000 pilgrims.

Organized. The inaugural function of its centenary celebrations, by Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi, from 4 to 7 July. Public meetings and cultural functions were held on the occasion.

Organized. The valedictory function of its diamond jubilee celebrations by Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur, on 4 July. Sri Viren J Shah, Governor of West Bengal, and other distinguished persons attended the function. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided. On this occasion Indian Epic Culture Centre, Kolkata, presented the college with the 'Vishwanayak Vivekananda Epic Award 2002'.

Laid. Foundation-stone for a hall to be built adjacent to Sadhu Nivas at Belur Math, by Most Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 12 July, the sacred Ratha Yatra day. The proposed hall will be used for educational and cultural purposes.

Conducted. A medical camp by Ramakrishna Mission, Puri, on the holy occasion of Ratha Yatra. 35 patients were treated in the camp and lemonade was served to more than 6000 pilgrims.

Celebrated. Its 71st Foundation Day, by Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, on 24 July. Sri Viren J Shah, Governor of West Bengal, and several other noted persons participated.

Held. Its 16th annual scientific conference, by the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences, Seva Pratishthan, on 27 and 28 July. The conference was inaugurated by Dr Surjya Kanta Mishra, Minister for Health, Government of West Bengal.

Secured. 7th, 9th and 10th positions on the Tribal Merit List at the secondary examinations conducted by the Meghalaya Board of School Education; by students of the school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji.

Secured. 3rd, 4th and 6th ranks at the higher secondary examinations conducted by the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education; by students of the college run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur.

Secured. 3rd and 5th positions at the higher secondary examinations (vocational) conducted by the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education; by students of Ramakrishna Mission Shilpayatan, Belur.

Achieved. A record of 87% in Mathematics (Honours), by a student of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The record has been surpassed only twice in the 100-year history of Calcutta University: in 1912 and 1966.

Renamed. Ramakrishna Math, Vytila to *Ramakrishna Math, Kochi*.

Revoked. Affiliation granted to Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Lusaka, Zambia, by the Ramakrishna Mission, due to lack of pos-

itive signs of desire on the part of the members to continue their association with the Mission.

Arise! Awake!! — An Exhibition

With a view to creating an increased awareness among people of Swami Vivekananda's message during the centenary of his mahasamadhi (2002), Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Yadavagiri, Mysore 570 020, has taken up a unique project. They have produced a multicolour poster exhibition on Swamiji's life and message, titled *Arise! Awake!!* The exhibition consists of a beautifully designed 40-panel kit. Over 1000 such exhibition kits have been produced for distribution through Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres to various institutions all over the country. Interested organizations can acquire these kits for display in their areas.

Salient points of this project: (1) Each kit consists of 40 panels measuring 48 cm x 73 cm; (2) Offset printed on 260 gsm duplex board, each panel has an attractive, laminated multicolour poster of Swami Vivekananda with an appropriate description in Swamiji's own words or through explanatory notes in English and one Indian language; (3) Each poster is mounted on a 10 mm thick thermocole sheet, framed by a PVC channel. Such panels facilitate easy display along walls on tables or benches; (4) Each kit is packed in two reusable, portable cardboard boxes (measuring 30" x 11" x 20" and weighing 6.5 kg) to facilitate easy movement for display in any remote place; (5) Such kits are designed to bear the wear and tear of a minimum of 10 exhibitions. With an audience of 1000 per exhibition, more than 1000 kits produced and distributed so far are estimated to attract about 1 crore people all over India.

Progress as on 17 June 2002: 1009 exhibition kits in different languages have already been produced and despatched to different parts of the country: Bengali (268), Hindi (187), Tamil (134), Kannada (127), Telugu (85), Gujarati (71), Marathi (66), Assamese (35), Malayalam (17), Oriya (16) and Sanskrit (3). The last three are reserved.

Who are the participants? (1) Almost all Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres in India; (2) Private centres under the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad; (3) Other ashramas and groups yet to be affiliated to the Bhava Prachar Parishad; (4) Vivekananda Kendra institutions; (5) Branches of the Vivekananda Yuva Maha Mandal; (6) Other interested educational institutions, youth groups and organizations.

When can these exhibitions be held? (1) Annual celebrations at schools and colleges; (2) Birthday celebrations of Swami Vivekananda and National Youth Day celebrations; (3) Religious occasions in temples; (4) Local fairs with large gatherings.

Cost Sharing: (1) Production, packing and transportation of the kits have cost the Ashrama Rs 16 lakh; (2) A nominal amount of Rs 250 per kit needs to be borne by each participating group; (3) The rest is expected to come from donations and sponsorships; (4) Sponsorship for each panel is fixed at Rs 25,000. 37 sponsors have already registered their names; (5) Sponsor's name and address will be displayed at the bottom of the panel on a 1.5"-wide strip.